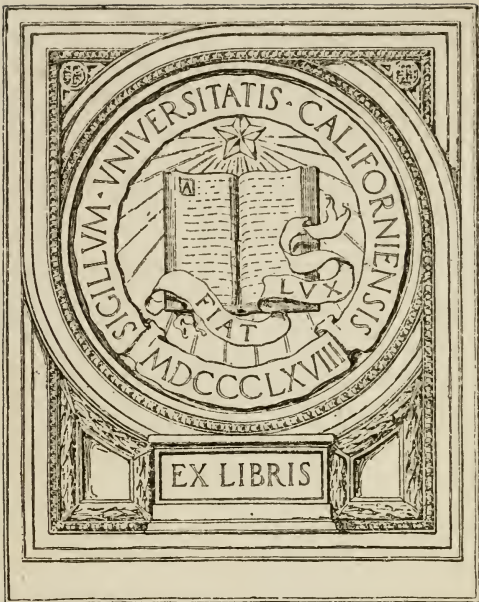


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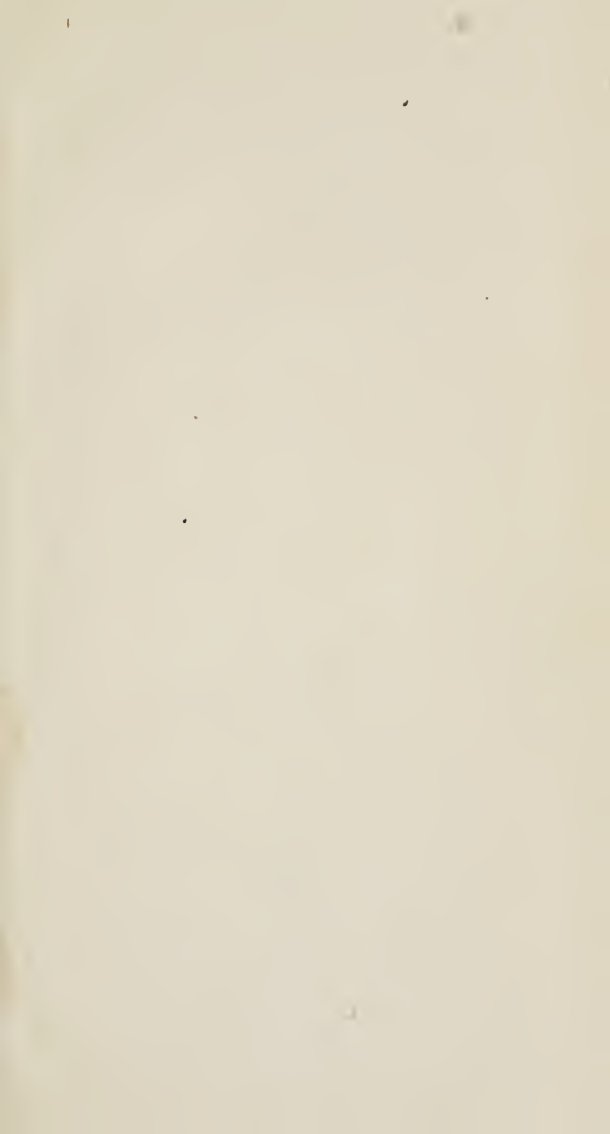


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THE
CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT
AND OTHER POEMS



“ **N**o tears of mine shall fall upon thy face ;
Whatever City thou hast gained, at last,
Better it is than that where thy feet passed
So many times, such weary nights and days.
Those journeying feet knew all its inmost ways ;
Where shapes and shadows of dread things were cast,
There moved thy soul, profoundly dark and vast,
There did thy voice its hymn of anguish raise.

Thou wouldst have left that City of great Night,
Yet travelled its dark mazes, all in vain ;
But one way leads from it, which found aright,
Who goes by it may not return again.
There didst thou grope thy way, through thy long pain ;
Hast thou, outside, found any world of light ? ”

PHILIP BOURKE MARSTON.

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT
AND OTHER POEMS BY
JAMES THOMSON



Portland, Maine
THOMAS B. MOSHER
Mdccccliij

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PROEM





PROEM

O ANTIQUE fables ! beautiful and bright
And joyous with the joyous youth of yore ;
O antique fables ! for a little light
Of that which shineth in you evermore,
To cleanse the dimness from our weary eyes,
And bathe our old world with a new surprise
Of golden dawn entrancing sea and shore.

We stagger under the enormous weight
Of all the heavy ages piled on us,
With all their grievous wrongs inveterate,
And all their disenchantments dolorous,
And all the monstrous tasks they have bequeathed ;
And we are stifled with the airs they breathed ;
And read in theirs our dooms calamitous.

Our world is all stript naked of their dreams ;
No deities in sky or sun or moon,
No nymphs in woods and hills and seas and streams ;
Mere earth and water, air and fire, their boon ;
No God in all our universe we trace,
No heaven in the infinitude of space,
No life beyond death — coming not too soon.

Our souls are stript of their illusions sweet,
Our hopes at best in some far future years

For others, not ourselves ; whose bleeding feet
 Wander this rocky waste where broken spears
 And bleaching bones lie scattered on the sand ;
 Who know *we* shall not reach the Promised Land ;
 Perhaps a mirage glistening through our tears.

And if there be this Promised Land indeed,
 Our children's children's children's heritage,
 Oh, what a prodigal waste of precious seed,
 Of myriad myriad lives from age to age,
 Of woes and agonies and blank despairs,
 Through countless cycles, that some fortunate heirs
 May enter, and conclude the pilgrimage !

But if it prove a mirage after all !
 Our last illusion leaves us wholly bare,
 To bruise against Fate's adamant wall,
 Consumed or frozen in the pitiless air ;
 In all our world, beneath, around, above,
 One only refuge, solace, triumph, — Love,
 Sole star of light in infinite black despair.

O antique fables ! beautiful and bright,
 And joyous with the joyous youth of yore ;
 O antique fables ! for a little light
 Of that which shineth in you evermore,
 To cleanse the dimness from our weary eyes,
 And bathe our old world with a new surprise
 Of golden dawn entrancing sea and shore.

January 1882.





THE
CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT
AND OTHER POEMS



“ Per me si va nella città dolente.”

— DANTE.

“ Poi di tanto adoprar, di tanti moti
D'ogni celeste, ogni terrena cosa,
Girando senza posa,
Per tornar sempre là donde son mosse ;
Uso alcuno, alcun frutto
Indovinar non so.”

“ Sola nel mondo eterna, a cui si volve
Ogni creata cosa,
In te, morte, si posa
Nostra ignuda natura ;
Lieta no, ma sicura
Dell' antico dolor. . . .
Però ch' esser beato
Nega ai mortali e nega a' morti il fato.”

— LEOPARDI.



THE
CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

1870:1874

PROEM

L o, thus, as prostrate, " In the dust I write
My heart's deep languor and my soul's sad tears."
Yet why evoke the spectres of black night
To blot the sunshine of exultant years?
Why disinter dead faith from mouldering hidden?
Why break the seals of mute despair unbidden,
And wail life's discords into careless ears?

Because a cold rage seizes one at whiles
To show the bitter old and wrinkled truth
Stripped naked of all vesture that beguiles,
False dreams, false hopes, false masks and modes
of youth ;
Because it gives some sense of power and passion
In helpless impotence to try to fashion
Our woe in living words howe'er uncouth.

Surely I write not for the hopeful young,
Or those who deem their happiness of worth,

Or such as pasture and grow fat among
The shows of life and feel nor doubt nor dearth,
Or pious spirits with a God above them
To sanctify and glorify and love them,
Or sages who foresee a heaven on earth.

For none of these I write, and none of these
Could read the writing if they deigned to try :
So may they flourish, in their due degrees,
On our sweet earth and in their unplaced sky.
If any cares for the weak words here written,
It must be some one desolate, Fate-smitten,
Whose faith and hope are dead, and who would die.

Yes, here and there some weary wanderer
In that same city of tremendous night,
Will understand the speech, and feel a stir
Of fellowship in all-disastrous fight ;
• “ I suffer mute and lonely, yet another
Uplifts his voice to let me know a brother
Travels the same wild paths though out of sight.”

O sad Fraternity, do I unfold
Your dolorous mysteries shrouded from of yore ?
Nay, be assured ; no secret can be told
To any who divined it not before :
None uninitiate by many a presage
Will comprehend the language of the message,
Although proclaimed aloud for evermore.

I

THE City is of Night; perchance of Death,
 But certainly of Night; for never there
 Can come the lucid morning's fragrant breath
 After the dewy dawning's cold grey air;
 The moon and stars may shine with scorn or pity;
 The sun has never visited that city,
 For it dissolveth in the daylight fair.

Dissolveth like a dream of night away;
 Though present in distempered gloom of thought
 And deadly weariness of heart all day.
 But when a dream night after night is brought
 Throughout a week, and such weeks few or many
 Recur each year for several years, can any
 Discern that dream from real life in aught?

For life is but a dream whose shapes return,
 Some frequently, some seldom, some by night
 And some by day, some night and day: we learn,
 The while all change and many vanish quite,
 In their recurrence with recurrent changes
 A certain seeming order; where this ranges
 We count things real; such is memory's might.

A river girds the city west and south,
 The main north channel of a broad lagoon,
 Regurgiting with the salt tides from the mouth;
 Waste marshes shine and glister to the moon

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

For leagues, then moorland black, then stony ridges ;
Great piers and causeways, many noble bridges,
Connect the town and islet suburbs strewn.

Upon an easy slope it lies at large,
And scarcely overlaps the long curved crest
Which swells out two leagues from the river marge.
A trackless wilderness rolls north and west,
Savannahs, savage woods, enormous mountains,
Bleak uplands, black ravines with torrent fountains ;
And eastward rolls the shipless sea's unrest.

The city is not ruinous, although
Great ruins of an unremembered past,
With others of a few short years ago
More sad, are found within its precincts vast.
The street-lamps always burn ; but scarce a casement
In house or palace front from roof to basement
Doth glow or gleam athwart the mirk air cast.

The street-lamps burn amidst the baleful glooms,
Amidst the soundless solitudes immense
Of rangèd mansions dark and still as tombs.
The silence which benumbs or strains the sense
Fulfils with awe the soul's despair unweeping :
Myriads of habitants are ever sleeping,
Or dead, or fled from nameless pestilence !

Yet as in some necropolis you find
Perchance one mourner to a thousand dead,

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

So there; worn faces that look deaf and blind
Like tragic masks of stone. With weary tread,
Each wrapt in his own doom, they wander, wander,
Or sit foredone and desolately ponder
Through sleepless hours with heavy drooping head.

Mature men chiefly, few in age or youth,
A woman rarely, now and then a child:
A child! If here the heart turns sick with ruth
To see a little one from birth defiled,
Or lame or blind, as preordained to languish
Through youthless life, think how it bleeds with anguish
To meet one erring in that homeless wild.

They often murmur to themselves, they speak
To one another seldom, for their woe
Broods maddening inwardly and scorns to wreak
Itself abroad; and if at whiles it grow
To frenzy which must rave, none heeds the clamour,
Unless there waits some victim of like glamour,
To rave in turn, who lends attentive show.

The City is of Night, but not of Sleep;
There sweet sleep is not for the weary brain;
The pitiless hours like years and ages creep,
A night seems termless hell. This dreadful strain
Of thought and consciousness which never ceases,
Or which some moments' stupor but increases,
This, worse than woe, makes wretches there insane.

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

They leave all hope behind who enter there:

One certitude while sane they cannot leave,

One anodyne for torture and despair;

The certitude of Death, which no reprieve

Can put off long; and which, divinely tender,

But waits the outstretched hand to promptly render

That draught whose slumber nothing can bereave.¹

1 Though the Garden of thy Life be wholly waste, the sweet flowers withered, the fruit-trees barren, over its wall hang ever the rich dark clusters of the Vine of Death, within easy reach of thy hand, which may pluck of them when it will.

II

BECAUSE he seemed to walk with an intent
I followed him; who, shadowlike and frail,
Unswervingly though slowly onward went,
 Regardless, wrapt in thought as in a veil:
Thus step for step with lonely sounding feet
We travelled many a long dim silent street.

At length he paused: a black mass in the gloom,
 A tower that merged into the heavy sky;
Around, the huddled stones of grave and tomb:
 Some old God's-acre now corruption's sty:
He murmured to himself with dull despair,
Here Faith died, poisoned by this charnel air.

Then turning to the right went on once more,
 And travelled weary roads without suspense;
And reached at last a low wall's open door,
 Whose villa gleamed beyond the foliage dense:
He gazed, and muttered with a hard despair,
Here Love died, stabbed by its own worshipped pair.

Then turning to the right resumed his march,
 And travelled streets and lanes with wondrous
 strength,
Until on stooping through a narrow arch
 We stood before a squalid house at length:
He gazed, and whispered with a cold despair,
Here Hope died, starved out in its utmost lair.

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

When he had spoken thus, before he stirred,
I spoke, perplexed by something in the signs
Of desolation I had seen and heard
In this drear pilgrimage to ruined shrines :
When Faith and Love and Hope are dead indeed,
Can Life still live ? By what doth it proceed ?

As whom his one intense thought overpowers,
He answered coldly, Take a watch, erase
The signs and figures of the circling hours,
Detach the hands, remove the dial-face ;
The works proceed until run down ; although
Bereft of purpose, void of use, still go.

Then turning to the right paced on again,
And traversed squares and travelled streets whose
glooms
Seemed more and more familiar to my ken ;
And reached that sullen temple of the tombs ;
And paused to murmur with the old despair,
Here Faith died, poisoned by this charnel air.

I ceased to follow, for the knot of doubt
Was severed sharply with a cruel knife :
He circled thus for ever tracing out
The series of the fraction left of Life ;
Perpetual recurrence in the scope
Of but three terms, dead Faith, dead Love, dead Hope.†

† Life divided by that persistent three = $\frac{LXX}{333} = .210.$

III

ALTHOUGH lamps burn along the silent streets ;
Even when moonlight silvers empty squares
The dark holds countless lanes and close retreats ;
But when the night its sphereless mantle wears
The open spaces yawn with gloom abysmal,
The sombre mansions loom immense and dismal,
The lanes are black as subterranean lairs. /

And soon the eye a strange new vision learns :
The night remains for it as dark and dense,
Yet clearly in this darkness it discerns
As in the daylight with its natural sense ;
Perceives a shade in shadow not obscurely,
Pursues a stir of black in blackness surely,
Sees spectres also in the gloom intense.

The ear, too, with the silence vast and deep
Becomes familiar though unreconciled ;
Hears breathings as of hidden life asleep,
And muffled throbs as of pent passions wild,
Far murmurs, speech of pity or derision ;
But all more dubious than the things of vision,
So that it knows not when it is beguiled.

No time abates the first despair and awe,
But wonder ceases soon ; the weirdest thing
Is felt least strange beneath the lawless law
Where Death-in-Life is the eternal king ;

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

Crushed impotent beneath this reign of terror,
Dazed with such mysteries of woe and error,
The soul is too outworn for wondering.

IV

HE stood alone within the spacious square
 Declaiming from the central grassy mound,
 With head uncovered and with streaming hair,
 As if large multitudes were gathered round:
 A stalwart shape, the gestures full of might,
 The glances burning with unnatural light: —

As I came through the desert thus it was,
 As I came through the desert: All was black,
 In heaven no single star, on earth no track;
 A brooding hush without a stir or note,
 The air so thick it clotted in my throat;
 And thus for hours; then some enormous things
 Swooped past with savage cries and clanking wings:
 But I strode on austere;
 No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
 As I came through the desert: Eyes of fire
 Glared at me throbbing with a starved desire;
 The hoarse and heavy and carnivorous breath
 Was hot upon me from deep jaws of death;
 Sharp claws, swift talons, fleshless fingers cold
 Plucked at me from the bushes, tried to hold:
 But I strode on austere;
 No hope could have no fear. ✓

As I came through the desert thus it was,
 As I came through the desert: Lo you, there,

That hillock burning with a brazen glare;
 Those myriad dusky flames with points a-glow
 Which writhed and hissed and darted to and fro;
 A Sabbath of the Serpents, heaped pell-mell
 For Devil's roll-call and some *fête* of Hell:

Yet I strode on austere;
 No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
 As I came through the desert: Meteors ran
 And crossed their javelins on the black sky-span;
 The zenith opened to a gulf of flame,
 The dreadful thunderbolts jarred earth's fixed frame:
 The ground all heaved in waves of fire that surged
 And weltered round me sole there unsubmerged:

Yet I strode on austere;
 No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
 As I came through the desert: Air once more,
 And I was close upon a wild sea-shore;
 Enormous cliffs arose on either hand,
 The deep tide thundered up a league-broad strand;
 White foambelts seethed there, wan spray swept and
 flew;

The sky broke, moon and stars and clouds and blue:

And I strode on austere;
 No hope could have no fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
 As I came through the desert: On the left

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

The sun arose and crowned a broad crag-cleft ;
There stopped and burned out black, except a rim,
A bleeding eyeless socket, red and dim ;
Whereon the moon fell suddenly south-west,
And stood above the right-hand cliffs at rest :
 Still I strode on austere ;
 No hope could have no fear. ✓

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : From the right
A shape came slowly with a ruddy light ;
A woman with a red lamp in her hand, ✓
Bareheaded and barefooted on that strand ;
O desolation moving with such grace !
O anguish with such beauty in thy face.
 I fell as on my bier,
 Hope travailed with such fear. /

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : I was twain,
Two selves distinct that cannot join again ;
One stood apart and knew but could not stir,
And watched the other stark in swoon and her ;
And she came on, and never turned aside,
Between such sun and moon and roaring tide :
 And as she came more near
 My soul grew mad with fear. ✓

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert : Hell is mild

And piteous matched with that accursèd wild ;
 A large black sign was on her breast that bowed,
 A broad black band ran down her snow-white shroud ;
 That lamp she held was her own burning heart,
 Whose blood-drops trickled step by step apart ;
 The mystery was clear ;
 Mad rage had swallowed fear.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
 As I came through the desert : By the sea
 She knelt and bent above that senseless me ;
 Those lamp-drops fell upon my white brow there,
 She tried to cleanse them with her tears and hair ;
 She murmured words of pity, love, and woe,
 She heeded not the level rushing flow :
 And mad with rage and fear,
 I stood stonebound so near.

As I came through the desert thus it was,
 As I came through the desert : When the tide
 Swept up to her there kneeling by my side,
 She clasped that corpse-like me, and they were borne
 Away, and this vile me was left forlorn ;
 I know the whole sea cannot quench that heart,
 Or cleanse that brow, or wash those two apart :
 They love ; their doom is drear,
 Yet they nor hope nor fear ;
 But I, what do I here ?

How he arrives there none can clearly know ;
 Athwart the mountains and immense wild tracts,
 Or flung a waif upon that vast sea-flow,
 Or down the river's boiling cataracts :
 To reach it is as dying fever-stricken ;
 To leave it, slow faint birth intense pangs quicken ;
 And memory swoons in both the tragic acts.

But being there one feels a citizen ;
 Escape seems hopeless to the heart forlorn : / .
 Can Death-in-Life be brought to life again ? / .
 And yet release does some ; there comes a morn
 When he awakes from slumbering so sweetly
 That all the world is changed for him completely,
 And he is verily as if new-born.

He scarcely can believe the blissful change,
 He weeps perchance who wept not while accurst ;
 Never again will he approach the range /
 Infested by that evil spell now burst : /
 Poor wretch ! who once hath paced that dolent city
 Shall pace it often, doomed beyond all pity,
 With horror ever deepening from the first.

Though he possess sweet babes and loving wife,
 A home of peace by loyal friendships cheered,
 And love them more than death or happy life,
 They shall avail not ; he must dree his weird ;

Renounce all blessings for that imprecation,
Steal forth and haunt that builded desolation,
Of woe and terrors and thick darkness reared :

VI

I SAT forlornly by the river-side,
And watched the bridge-lamps glow like golden
stars

Above the blackness of the swelling tide,
Down which they struck rough gold in ruddier bars ;
And heard the heave and plashing of the flow
Against the wall a dozen feet below.

Large elm-trees stood along that river-walk ;
And under one, a few steps from my seat,
I heard strange voices join in stranger talk,
Although I had not heard approaching feet :
These bodiless voices in my waking dream
Flowed dark words blending with the sombre
stream :—

And you have after all come back ; come back.
I was about to follow on your track.
And you have failed : our spark of hope is black.

That I have failed is proved by my return :
The spark is quenched, nor ever more will burn.
But listen ; and the story you shall learn.

I reached the portal common spirits fear,
And read the words above it, dark yet clear,
“Leave hope behind, all ye who enter here :” /

And would have passed in, gratified to gain
That positive eternity of pain,
Instead of this insufferable inane.

A demon warder clutched me, Not so fast ;
First leave your hopes behind !—But years have passed
Since I left all behind me, to the last :

You cannot count for hope, with all your wit,
This bleak despair that drives me to the Pit :
How could I seek to enter void of it ?

He snarled, What thing is this which apes a soul,
And would find entrance to our gulf of dole
Without the payment of the settled toll ?

Outside the gate he showed an open chest :
Here pay their entrance fees the souls unblest ;
Cast in some hope, you enter with the rest.

This is Pandora's box ; whose lid shall shut,
And Hell-gate too, when hopes have filled it ; but
They are so thin that it will never glut.

I stood a few steps backwards, desolate ;
And watched the spirits pass me to their fate,
And fling off hope, and enter at the gate.

When one casts off a load he springs upright,
Squares back his shoulders, breathes with all his might,
And briskly paces forward strong and light :

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

But these, as if they took some burden, bowed ;
The whole frame sank ; however strong and proud
Before, they crept in quite infirm and cowed.

And as they passed me, earnestly from each
A morsel of his hope I did beseech,
To pay my entrance ; but all mocked my speech.

Not one would cede a tittle of his store,
Though knowing that in instants three or four
He must resign the whole for evermore.

So I returned. Our destiny is fell ;
For in this Limbo we must ever dwell,
Shut out alike from Heaven and Earth and Hell.

The other sighed back, Yea ; but if we grope
With care through all this Limbo's dreary scope,
We yet may pick up some minute lost hope ;

And, sharing it between us, entrance win,
In spite of fiends so jealous for gross sin :
Let us without delay our search begin.

VII

SOME say that phantoms haunt those shadowy streets,
And mingle freely there with sparse mankind ;
And tell of ancient woes and black defeats,
And murmur mysteries in the grave enshrined :
But others think them visions of illusion,
Or even men gone far in self-confusion ;
No man there being wholly sane in mind.

And yet a man who raves, however mad,
Who bares his heart and tells of his own fall,
Reserves some inmost secret good or bad :
The phantoms have no reticence at all :
The nudity of flesh will blush though tameless,
The extreme nudity of bone grins shameless,
The unsexed skeleton mocks shroud and pall.

I have seen phantoms there that were as men
And men that were as phantoms flit and roam ;
Marked shapes that were not living to my ken,
Caught breathings acrid as with Dead Sea foam :
The City rests for man so weird and awful,
That his intrusion there might seem unlawful,
And phantoms there may have their proper home.

VIII

WHILE I still lingered on that river-walk,
And watched the tide as black as our black
doom,

I heard another couple join in talk,
And saw them to the left hand in the gloom
Seated against an elm bole on the ground,
Their eyes intent upon the stream profound.

“I never knew another man on earth
But had some joy and solace in his life,
Some chance of triumph in the dreadful strife :
My doom has been unmitigated dearth.”

“We gaze upon the river, and we note
The various vessels large and small that float,
Ignoring every wrecked and sunken boat.”

“And yet I asked no splendid dower, no spoil
Of sway or fame or rank or even wealth ;
But homely love with common food and health,
And nightly sleep to balance daily toil.”

“This all-too humble soul would arrogate
Unto itself some signalling hate
From the supreme indifference of Fate !”

“Who is most wretched in this dolorous place ?
I think myself ; yet I would rather be

My miserable self than He, than He
Who formed such creatures to His own disgrace.

“The vilest thing must be less vile than Thou
From whom it had its being, God and Lord !
Creator of all woe and sin ! abhorred,
Malignant and implacable ! I vow

“That not for all Thy power furred and unfurled,
For all the temples to Thy glory built,
Would I assume the ignominious guilt
Of having made such men in such a world.”

“As if a Being, God or Fiend, could reign,
At once so wicked, foolish, and insane,
As to produce men when He might refrain !

“The world rolls round for ever like a mill ;
It grinds out death and life and good and ill ;
It has no purpose, heart or mind or will.

“While air of Space and Time’s full river flow
The mill must blindly whirl unresting so :
It may be wearing out, but who can know ?

“Man might know one thing were his sight less dim ;
That it whirls not to suit his petty whim,
That it is quite indifferent to him.

“Nay, does it treat him harshly as he saith ?
It grinds him some slow years of bitter breath,
Then grinds him back into eternal death.”

IX

It is full strange to him who hears and feels,
When wandering there in some deserted street,
The booming and the jar of ponderous wheels,
The trampling clash of heavy ironshod feet :
Who in this Venice of the Black Sea rideth ?
Who in this city of the stars abideth
To buy or sell as those in daylight sweet ?

The rolling thunder seems to fill the sky
As it comes on ; the horses snort and strain,
The harness jingles, as it passes by ;
The hugeness of an overburthened wain :
A man sits nodding on the shaft or trudges
Three parts asleep beside his fellow-drudges :
And so it rolls into the night again.

What merchandise ? whence, whither, and for whom ?
Perchance it is a Fate-appointed hearse,
Bearing away to some mysterious tomb
Or Limbo of the scornful universe
The joy, the peace, the life-hope, the abortions
Of all things good which should have been our portions,
But have been strangled by that City's curse.

X

THE mansion stood apart in its own ground ;
In front thereof a fragrant garden-lawn,
High trees about it, and the whole walled round :
The massy iron gates were both withdrawn ;
And every window of its front shed light,
Portentous in that City of the Night.

But though thus lighted it was deadly still
As all the countless bulks of solid gloom :
Perchance a congregation to fulfil
Solemnities of silence in this doom,
Mysterious rites of dolour and despair
Permitting not a breath of chant or prayer ?

Broad steps ascended to a terrace broad
Whereon lay still light from the open door ;
The hall was noble, and its aspect awed,
Hung round with heavy black from dome to floor ;
And ample stairways rose to left and right
Whose balustrades were also draped with night.

I paced from room to room, from hall to hall,
Nor any life throughout the maze discerned ;
But each was hung with its funereal pall,
And held a shrine, around which tapers burned,
With picture or with statue or with bust,
All copied from the same fair form of dust :

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

A woman very young and very fair ;
Beloved by bounteous life and joy and youth,
And loving these sweet lovers, so that care
And age and death seemed not for her in sooth :
Alike as stars, all beautiful and bright,
These shapes lit up that mausoléan night.

At length I heard a murmur as of lips,
And reached an open oratory hung
With heaviest blackness of the whole eclipse ;
Beneath the dome a fuming censer swung ;
And one lay there upon a low white bed,
With tapers burning at the foot and head :

The Lady of the images : supine,
Deathstill, lifesweet, with folded palms she lay :
And kneeling there as at a sacred shrine
A young man wan and worn who seemed to pray :
A crucifix of dim and ghostly white
Surmounted the large altar left in night :—

The chambers of the mansion of my heart,
In every one whereof thine image dwells,
Are black with grief eternal for thy sake.

The inmost oratory of my soul,
Wherein thou ever dwellest quick or dead,
Is black with grief eternal for thy sake.

I kneel beside thee and I clasp the cross,
With eyes for ever fixed upon that face,
So beautiful and dreadful in its calm.

I kneel here patient as thou liest there ;
As patient as a statue carved in stone,
Of adoration and eternal grief.

While thou dost not awake I cannot move ;
And something tells me thou wilt never wake,
And I alive feel turning into stone.

Most beautiful were Death to end my grief,
Most hateful to destroy the sight of thee,
Dear vision better than all death or life.

But I renounce all choice of life or death,
For either shall be ever at thy side,
And thus in bliss or woe be ever well.—

He murmured thus and thus in monotone,
Intent upon that uncorrupted face,
Entranced except his moving lips alone :
I glided with hushed footsteps from the place.
This was the festival that filled with light
That palace in the City of the Night.

XI

WHAT men are they who haunt these fatal glooms,
 And fill their living mouths with dust of death,
 And make their habitations in the tombs,
 And breathe eternal sighs with mortal breath,
 And pierce life's pleasant veil of various error
 To reach that void of darkness and old terror
 Wherein expire the lamps of hope and faith ?

They have much wisdom yet they are not wise,
 They have much goodness yet they do not well,
 (The fools we know have their own Paradise,
 The wicked also have their proper Hell) ;
 They have much strength but still their doom is
 stronger,
 Much patience but their time endureth longer,
 Much valour but life mocks it with some spell.

They are most rational and yet insane :
 An outward madness not to be controlled ;
 A perfect reason in the central brain,
 Which has no power, but sitteth wan and cold,
 And sees the madness, and foresees as plainly
 The ruin in its path, and trieth vainly
 To cheat itself refusing to behold.

And some are great in rank and wealth and power,
 And some renowned for genius and for worth ;
 And some are poor and mean, who brood and cower
 And shrink from notice, and accept all dearth

Of body, heart and soul, and leave to others
All boons of life : yet these and those are brothers,
The saddest and the weariest men on earth.

XII

OUR isolated units could be brought
To act together for some common end?
For one by one, each silent with his thought,
I marked a long loose line approach and wend
Athwart the great cathedral's cloistered square,
And slowly vanish from the moonlit air.

Then I would follow in among the last :
And in the porch a shrouded figure stood,
Who challenged each one pausing ere he passed,
With deep eyes burning through a blank white hood :
Whence come you in the world of life and light
To this our City of Tremendous Night ?—

From pleading in a senate of rich lords
For some scant justice to our countless hordes
Who toil half-starved with scarce a human right :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From wandering through many a solemn scene
Of opium visions, with a heart serene
And intellect miraculously bright :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From making hundreds laugh and roar with glee
By my transcendent feats of mimicry,
And humour wanton as an elfish sprite :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From prayer and fasting in a lonely cell,
Which brought an ecstasy ineffable
Of love and adoration and delight :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From ruling on a splendid kingly throne
A nation which beneath my rule has grown
Year after year in wealth and arts and might :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From preaching to an audience fired with faith
The Lamb who died to save our souls from death,
Whose blood hath washed our scarlet sins wool-white :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From drinking fiery poison in a den
Crowded with tawdry girls and squalid men,
Who hoarsely laugh and curse and brawl and fight :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From picturing with all beauty and all grace
First Eden and the parents of our race,
A luminous rapture unto all men's sight :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

From writing a great work with patient plan
To justify the ways of God to man,
And show how ill must fade and perish quite :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

From desperate fighting with a little band
Against the powerful tyrants of our land,
To free our brethren in their own despite :
I wake from daydreams to this real night.

Thus, challenged by that warder sad and stern,
Each one responded with his countersign,
Then entered the cathedral ; and in turn
I entered also, having given mine ;
But lingered near until I heard no more,
And marked the closing of the massive door.

XIII

OF all things human which are strange and wild
This is perchance the wildest and most strange,
And showeth man most utterly beguiled,

To those who haunt that sunless City's range ;
That he bemoans himself for aye, repeating
How time is deadly swift, how life is fleeting,
How naught is constant on the earth but change.

The hours are heavy on him and the days ;
The burden of the months he scarce can bear ;
And often in his secret soul he prays

To sleep through barren periods unaware,
Arousing at some longed-for date of pleasure ;
Which having passed and yielded him small treasure,
He would outsleep another term of care.

Yet in his marvellous fancy he must make

Quick wings for Time, and see it fly from us ;
This Time which crawleth like a monstrous snake,
Wounded and slow and very venomous ;
Which creeps blindwormlike round the earth and ocean,
Distilling poison at each painful motion,
And seems condemned to circle ever thus.

And since he cannot spend and use aright

The little time here given him in trust,
But wasteth it in weary undelight
Of foolish toil and trouble, strife and lust,

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

He naturally claimeth to inherit
The everlasting Future, that his merit
 May have full scope; as surely is most just.

O length of the intolerable hours,
 O nights that are as æons of slow pain,
O Time, too ample for our vital powers,
 O Life, whose woeful vanities remain
Immutable for all of all our legions
Through all the centuries and in all the regions,
 Not of your speed and variance *we* complain.

We do not ask a longer term of strife,
 Weakness and weariness and nameless woes :
We do not claim renewed and endless life
 When this which is our torment here shall close,
An everlasting conscious inanition !
We yearn for speedy death in full fruition,
 Dateless oblivion and divine repose.

XIV

LARGE glooms were gathered in the mighty fane,
With tinted moongleams slanting here and there;
And all was hush: no swelling organ-strain,
No chant, no voice or murmuring of prayer;
No priests came forth, no tinkling censers fumed,
And the high altar space was unillumed.

Around the pillars and against the walls
Leaned men and shadows; others seemed to brood
Bent or recumbent in secluded stalls.
Perchance they were not a great multitude
Save in that city of so lonely streets
Where one may count up every face he meets.

All patiently awaited the event
Without a stir or sound, as if no less
Self-occupied, doomstricken, while attent.
And then we heard a voice of solemn stress
From the dark pulpit, and our gaze there met
Two eyes which burned as never eyes burned yet:

Two steadfast and intolerable eyes
Burning beneath a broad and rugged brow;
The head behind it of enormous size.
And as black fir-groves in a large wind bow,
Our rooted congregation, gloom-arrayed,
By that great sad voice deep and full were swayed:—

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

O melancholy Brothers, dark, dark, dark !
O battling in black floods without an ark !
O spectral wanderers of unholy Night !
My soul hath bled for you these sunless years,
With bitter blood-drops running down like tears :
Oh, dark, dark, dark, withdrawn from joy and light !

My heart is sick with anguish for your bale ;
Your woe hath been my anguish ; yea, I quail
And perish in your perishing unblest.
And I have searched the highths and depths, the scope
Of all our universe, with desperate hope
To find some solace for your wild unrest.

And now at last authentic word I bring,
Witnessed by every dead and living thing ;
Good tidings of great joy for you, for all :
There is no God ; no Fiend with names divine
Made us and tortures us ; if we must pine,
It is to satiate no Being's gall.

It was the dark delusion of a dream,
That living Person conscious and supreme,
Whom we must curse for cursing us with life ;
Whom we must curse because the life He gave
Could not be buried in the quiet grave,
Could not be killed by poison or by knife.

This little life is all we must endure,
The grave's most holy peace is ever sure,
We fall asleep and never wake again ;

Nothing is of us but the mouldering flesh,
Whose elements dissolve and merge afresh
In earth, air, water, plants, and other men.

We finish thus; and all our wretched race
Shall finish with its cycle, and give place
To other beings, with their own time-doom
Infinite æons ere our kind began;
Infinite æons after the last man
Has joined the mammoth in earth's tomb and womb.

We bow down to the universal laws,
Which never had for man a special clause
Of cruelty or kindness, love or hate:
If toads and vultures are obscene to sight,
If tigers burn with beauty and with might,
Is it by favour or by wrath of fate?

All substance lives and struggles evermore
Through countless shapes continually at war,
By countless interactions interknit:
If one is born a certain day on earth,
All times and forces tended to that birth,
Not all the world could change or hinder it.

I find no hint throughout the Universe
Of good or ill, of blessing or of curse;
I find alone Necessity Supreme;
With infinite Mystery, abysmal, dark,
Unlighted ever by the faintest spark
For us the fitting shadows of a dream.

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

O Brothers of sad lives ! they are so brief ;
A few short years must bring us all relief :

Can we not bear these years of labouring breath ?
But if you would not this poor life fulfil,
Lo, you are free to end it when you will,
Without the fear of waking after death.—

The organ-like vibrations of his voice

Thrilled through the vaulted aisles and died away ;
The yearning of the tones which bade rejoice
Was sad and tender as a requiem lay :
Our shadowy congregation rested still
As brooding on that "End it when you will."

XV

WHEREVER men are gathered, all the air
Is charged with human feeling, human thought ;
Each shout and cry and laugh, each curse and prayer,
Are into its vibrations surely wrought ;
Unspoken passion, wordless meditation,
Are breathed into it with our respiration ;
It is with our life fraught and overfraught.

So that no man there breathes earth's simple breath,
As if alone on mountains or wide seas ;
But nourishes warm life or hastens death
With joys and sorrows, health and foul disease,
Wisdom and folly, good and evil labours,
Incessant of his multitudinous neighbours ;
He in his turn affecting all of these.

That City's atmosphere is dark and dense,
Although not many exiles wander there,
With many a potent evil influence,
Each adding poison to the poisoned air ;
Infections of unutterable sadness,
Infections of incalculable madness,
Infections of incurable despair.

XVI

OUR shadowy congregation rested still,
As musing on that message we had heard
And brooding on that "End it when you will ;"
Perchance awaiting yet some other word ;
When keen as lightning through a muffled sky
Sprang forth a shrill and lamentable cry :—

The man speaks sooth, alas ! the man speaks sooth :
We have no personal life beyond the grave ;
There is no God ; Fate knows nor wrath nor ruth :
Can I find here the comfort which I crave ?

In all eternity I had one chance,
One few years' term of gracious human life :
The splendours of the intellect's advance,
The sweetness of the home with babes and wife ;

The social pleasures with their genial wit ;
The fascination of the worlds of art,
The glories of the worlds of nature, lit
By large imagination's glowing heart ;

The rapture of mere being, full of health ;
The careless childhood and the ardent youth,
The strenuous manhood winning various wealth,
The reverend age serene with life's long truth :

All the sublime prerogatives of Man ;
The storied memories of the times of old,
The patient tracking of the world's great plan
Through sequences and changes myriadfold.

This chance was never offered me before ;
For me the infinite Past is blank and dumb :
This chance recurreth never, nevermore ;
Blank, blank for me the infinite To-come.

And this sole chance was frustrate from my birth,
A mockery, a delusion ; and my breath
Of noble human life upon this earth
So racks me that I sigh for senseless death.

My wine of life is poison mixed with gall,
My noonday passes in a nightmare dream,
I worse than lose the years which are my all :
What can console me for the loss supreme ?

Speak not of comfort where no comfort is,
Speak not at all : can words make foul things fair ?
Our life's a cheat, our death a black abyss :
Hush and be mute envisaging despair.—

This vehement voice came from the northern aisle
Rapid and shrill to its abrupt harsh close ;
And none gave answer for a certain while,
For words must shrink from these most wordless
woes ;

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

At last the pulpit speaker simply said,
With humid eyes and thoughtful drooping head : —

My Brother, my poor Brothers, it is thus ;
This life itself holds nothing good for us,
 But it ends soon and nevermore can be ;
And we knew nothing of it ere our birth,
And shall know nothing when consigned to earth :
 I ponder these thoughts and they comfort me.

XVII

How the moon triumphs through the endless nights !
How the stars throb and glitter as they wheel
Their thick processions of supernal lights
 Around the blue vault obdurate as steel !
And men regard with passionate awe and yearning
The mighty marching and the golden burning,
 And think the heavens respond to what they feel.

Boats gliding like dark shadows of a dream,
 Are glorified from vision as they pass
The quivering moonbridge on the deep black stream ;
 Cold windows kindle their dead glooms of glass
To restless crystals ; cornice, dome, and column
Emerge from chaos in the splendour solemn ;
 Like faëry lakes gleam lawns of dewy grass.

With such a living light these dead eyes shine,
 These eyes of sightless heaven, that as we gaze
We read a pity, tremulous, divine,
 Or cold majestic scorn in their pure rays :
Fond man ! they are not haughty, are not tender ;
There is no heart or mind in all their splendour,
 They thread mere puppets all their marvellous maze.

If we could near them with the flight unflown,
 We should but find them worlds as sad as this,
Or suns all self-consuming like our own
 Enringed by planet worlds as much amiss :

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

They wax and wane through fusion and confusion ;
The spheres eternal are a grand illusion,
The empyréan is a void abyss.

XVIII

I WANDERED in a suburb of the north,
And reached a spot whence three close lanes led
down,

Beneath thick trees and hedgerows winding forth

Like deep brook channels, deep and dark and lown :
The air above was wan with misty light,
The dull grey south showed one vague blur of white.

I took the left-hand lane and slowly trod

Its earthen footpath, brushing as I went
The humid leafage ; and my feet were shod

With heavy languor, and my frame downbent,
With infinite sleepless weariness outworn,
So many nights I thus had paced forlorn.

After a hundred steps I grew aware

Of something crawling in the lane below ;
It seemed a wounded creature prostrate there

That sobbed with pangs in making progress slow,
The hind limbs stretched to push, the fore limbs then
To drag ; for it would die in its own den.

But coming level with it I discerned

That it had been a man ; for at my tread
It stopped in its sore travail and half-turned,
Leaning upon its right, and raised its head,
And with the left hand twitched back as in ire
Long grey unreverend locks befouled with mire.

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

A haggard filthy face with bloodshot eyes,
An infamy for manhood to behold.
He gasped all trembling, What, you want my prize?
You leave, to rob me, wine and lust and gold
And all that men go mad upon, since you
Have traced my sacred secret of the clue?

You think that I am weak and must submit ;
Yet I but scratch you with this poisoned blade,
And you are dead as if I clove with it
That false fierce greedy heart. Betrayed ! betrayed !
I fling this phial if you seek to pass,
And you are forthwith shrivelled up like grass.

And then with sudden change, Take thought ! take
thought !
Have pity on me ! it is mine alone.
If you could find, it would avail you naught ;
Seek elsewhere on the pathway of your own :
For who of mortal or immortal race
The lifetrack of another can retrace ?

Did you but know my agony and toil !
Two lanes diverge up yonder from this lane ;
My thin blood marks the long length of their soil ;
Such clue I left, who sought my clue in vain :
My hands and knees are worn both flesh and bone ;
I cannot move but with continual moan.

But I am in the very way at last

To find the long-lost broken golden thread
Which reunites my present with my past,

If you but go your own way. And I said,
I will retire as soon as you have told
Whereunto leadeth this lost thread of gold.

And so you know it not! he hissed with scorn;

I feared you, imbecile! It leads me back
From this accursed night without a morn,

And through the deserts which have else no track,
And through vast wastes of horror-haunted time,
To Eden innocence in Eden's clime:

And I become a nursling soft and pure,

An infant cradled on its mother's knee,
Without a past, love-cherished and secure;

Which if it saw this loathsome present Me,
Would plunge its face into the pillowing breast,
And scream abhorrence hard to lull to rest.

He turned to grope; and I retiring brushed

Thin shreds of gossamer from off my face,
And mused, His life would grow, the germ uncrushed;
He should to antenatal night retrace,
And hide his elements in that large womb
Beyond the reach of man-evolving Doom.

And even thus, what weary way were planned,

To seek oblivion through the far-off gate

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

Of birth, when that of death is close at hand!

For this is law, if law there be in Fate:

What never has been, yet may have its when;

The thing which has been, never is again.

XIX

THE mighty river flowing dark and deep,
With ebb and flood from the remote sea-tides
Vague-sounding through the City's sleepless sleep,
Is named the River of the Suicides ;
For night by night some lorn wretch overweary,
And shuddering from the future yet more dreary,
Within its cold secure oblivion hides.

One plunges from a bridge's parapet,
As by some blind and sudden frenzy hurled ;
Another wades in slow with purpose set
Until the waters are above him furled ;
Another in a boat with dreamlike motion
Glides drifting down into the desert ocean,
To starve or sink from out the desert world.

They perish from their suffering surely thus,
For none beholding them attempts to save,
The while each thinks how soon, solicitous,
He may seek refuge in the self-same wave ;
Some hour when tired of ever-vain endurance
Impatience will forerun the sweet assurance
Of perfect peace eventual in the grave.

When this poor tragic-farce has palled us long,
Why actors and spectators do we stay ? —
To fill our so-short rôles out right or wrong ;
To see what shifts are yet in the dull play

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

For our illusion ; to refrain from grieving
Dear foolish friends by our untimely leaving :
 But those asleep at home, how blest are they !

Yet it is but for one night after all :
 What matters one brief night of dreary pain ?
When after it the weary eyelids fall
 Upon the weary eyes and wasted brain ;
And all sad scenes and thoughts and feelings vanish
In that sweet sleep no power can ever banish,
 That one best sleep which never wakes again.

XX

I SAT me weary on a pillar's base,
 And leaned against the shaft ; for broad moonlight
 O'erflowed the peacefulness of cloistered space,
 A shore of shadow slanting from the right :
 The great cathedral's western front stood there,
 A wave-worn rock in that calm sea of air.

Before it, opposite my place of rest,
 Two figures faced each other, large, austere ;
 A couchant sphinx in shadow to the breast,
 An angel standing in the moonlight clear ;
 So mighty by magnificence of form,
 They were not dwarfed beneath that mass enorm.

Upon the cross-hilt of a naked sword
 The angel's hands, as prompt to smite, were held ;
 His vigilant intense regard was poured
 Upon the creature placidly unquelled,
 Whose front was set at level gaze which took
 No heed of aught, a solemn trance-like look.

And as I pondered these opposèd shapes
 My eyelids sank in stupor, that dull swoon
 Which drugs and with a leaden mantle drapes
 The outworn to worse weariness. But soon
 A sharp and clashing noise the stillness broke,
 And from the evil lethargy I woke.

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

man's imagination of power
The angel's wings had fallen, stone on stone,
And lay there shattered; hence the sudden sound :
A warrior leaning on his sword alone
Now watched the sphinx with that regard profound ;
The sphinx unchanged looked forthright, as aware
Of nothing in the vast abyss of air.

Again I sank in that repose unsweet,
Again a clashing noise my slumber rent ;
The warrior's sword lay broken at his feet :
An unarmed man with raised hands impotent
Now stood before the sphinx, which ever kept
Such mien as if with open eyes it slept.

attempt to conquer with fists

My eyelids sank in spite of wonder grown ;
A louder crash upstartled me in dread :
The man had fallen forward, stone on stone,
And lay there shattered, with his trunkless head
Between the monster's large quiescent paws,
Beneath its grand front changeless as life's laws.

The moon had circled westward full and bright,
And made the temple-front a mystic dream,
And bathed the whole enclosure with its light,
The sworded angel's wrecks, the sphinx supreme :
I pondered long that cold majestic face
Whose vision seemed of infinite void space.

XXI

A NEAR the centre of that northern crest
Stands out a level upland bleak and bare,
From which the city east and south and west
Sinks gently in long waves ; and thronèd there
An Image sits, stupendous, superhuman,
The bronze colossus of a wingèd Woman,
Upon a graded granite base foursquare.

Low-seated she leans forward massively,
With cheek on clenched left hand, the forearm's might
Erect, its elbow on her rounded knee ;
Across a clasped book in her lap the right
Upholds a pair of compasses ; she gazes
With full set eyes, but wandering in thick mazes
Of sombre thought beholds no outward sight.

Words cannot picture her ; but all men know
That solemn sketch the pure sad artist wrought
Three centuries and threescore years ago,
With phantasies of his peculiar thought :
The instruments of carpentry and science
Scattered about her feet, in strange alliance
With the keen wolf-hound sleeping undistraught ;

Scales, hour-glass, bell, and magic-square above ;
The grave and solid infant perched beside,
With open winglets that might bear a dove,
Intent upon its tablets, heavy-eyed ;

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

Her folded wings as of a mighty eagle,
But all too impotent to lift the regal
Robustness of her earth-born strength and pride ;

And with those wings, and that light wreath which seems
To mock her grand head and the knotted frown
Of forehead charged with baleful thoughts and dreams,
The household bunch of keys, the housewife's gown
Voluminous, indented, and yet rigid
As if a shell of burnished metal frigid,
The feet thick shod to tread all weakness down ;

The comet hanging o'er the waste dark seas,
The massy rainbow curved in front of it,
Beyond the village with the masts and trees ;
The snaky imp, dog-headed, from the Pit,
Bearing upon its batlike leathern pinions
Her name unfolded in the sun's dominions,
The " MELENCOLIA " that transcends all wit.

Thus has the artist copied her, and thus
Surrounded to expound her form sublime,
Her fate heroic and calamitous ;
Fronting the dreadful mysteries of Time,
Unvanquished in defeat and desolation,
Undaunted in the hopeless conflagration
Of the day setting on her baffled prime.

Baffled and beaten back she works on still,
Weary and sick of soul she works the more,

Sustained by her indomitable will :

The hands shall fashion and the brain shall pore
 And all her sorrow shall be turned to labour,
 Till death the friend-foe piercing with his sabre
 That mighty heart of hearts ends bitter war.

But as if blacker night could dawn on night,
 With tenfold gloom on moonless night unstarred,
 A sense more tragic than defeat and blight,
 More desperate than strife with hope debarred,
 More fatal than the adamantine Never
 Encompassing her passionate endeavour,
 Dawns glooming in her tenebrous regard :

The sense that every struggle brings defeat
 Because Fate holds no prize to crown success ;
 That all the oracles are dumb or cheat
 Because they have no secret to express ;
 That none can pierce the vast black veil uncertain
 Because there is no light beyond the curtain ;
 That all is vanity and nothingness.

Titanic from her high throne in the north,
 That City's sombre Patroness and Queen,
 In bronze sublimity she gazes forth
 Over her Capital of teen and threne,
 Over the river with its isles and bridges,
 The marsh and moorland, to the stern rock-ridges,
 Confronting them with a coëval mien.

THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT

The moving moon and stars from east to west
Circle before her in the sea of air;
Shadows and gleams glide round her solemn rest.
Her subjects often gaze up to her there:
The strong to drink new strength of iron endurance,
The weak new terrors; all, renewed assurance
And confirmation of the old despair.



TO OUR LADIES OF DEATH¹

“Tired with all these, for restful death I cry.”

SHAKESPEARE: *Sonnet 66.*

WEARY of erring in this desert Life,
Weary of hoping hopes for ever vain,
Weary of struggling in all-sterile strife,
Weary of thought which maketh nothing plain,
I close my eyes and calm my panting breath,
And pray to Thee, O ever-quiet Death!
To come and soothe away my bitter pain.

The strong shall strive, — may they be victors crowned;
The wise still seek, — may they at length find Truth;
The young still hope, — may purest love be found
To make their age more glorious than their youth.
For me; my brain is weak, my heart is cold,
My hope and faith long dead; my life but bold
In jest and laugh to parry hateful ruth.

Over me pass the days and months and years
Like squadrons and battalions of the foe
Trampling with thoughtless thrusts and alien jeers
Over a wounded soldier lying low:
He grips his teeth, or flings them words of scorn
To mar their triumph: but the while, outworn,
Inwardly craves for death to end his woe.

¹ The Three Ladies suggested by the sublime sisterhood of Our Ladies of Sorrow, in the “*Suspiria de Profundis*” of De Quincey.

Thus I, in secret, call, O Death ! to Thee,
 Thou Youngest of the solemn Sisterhood,
 Thou Gentlest of the mighty Sisters Three
 Whom I have known so well since first endued
 By Love and Grief with vision to discern
 What spiritual life doth throb and burn
 Through all our world, with evil powers and good.

The Three whom I have known so long, so well,
 By intimate communion, face to face,
 In every mood, of Earth, of Heaven, of Hell,
 In every season and in every place,
 That joy of Life has ceased to visit me,
 As one estranged by powerful witchery,
 Infatuate in a Siren's weird embrace.

First Thou, O priestess, phophetess, and queen,
 Our Lady of Beatitudes, first Thou:
 Of mighty stature, of seraphic mien,
 Upon the tablet of whose broad white brow
 Unvanquishable Truth is written clear,
 The secret of the mystery of our sphere,
 The regnant word of the Eternal Now.

Thou standest garmented in purest white ;
 But from thy shoulders wings of power half-spread
 Invest thy form with such miraculous light
 As dawn may clothe the earth with : and, instead
 Of any jewel-kindled golden crown,
 The glory of thy long hair flowing down
 Is dazzling noonday sunshine round thy head.

TO OUR LADIES OF DEATH

Upon a sword thy left hand resteth calm,
A naked sword, two-edged and long and straight ;
A branch of olive with a branch of palm
Thy right hand proffereth to hostile Fate.
The shining plumes that clothe thy feet are bound
By knotted strings, as if to tread the ground
With weary steps when thou wouldst soar elate.

Twin heavens uplifted to the heavens, thine eyes
Are solemn with unutterable thought
And love and aspiration ; yet there lies
Within their light eternal sadness, wrought
By hope deferred and baffled tenderness :
Of all the souls whom thou dost love and bless,
How few revere and love thee as they ought !

Thou leadest heroes from their warfare here
To nobler fields where grander crowns are won ;
Thou leadest sages from this twilight sphere
To cloudless heavens and an unsetting sun ;
Thou leadest saints unto that purer air
Whose breath is spiritual life and prayer :
Yet, lo ! they seek thee not, but fear and shun !

Thou takest to thy most maternal breast
Young children from the desert of this earth,
Ere sin hath stained their souls, or grief opprest,
And bearest them unto an heavenly birth,
To be the Vestals of God's Fane above :
And yet their kindred moan against thy love,
With wild and selfish moans in bitter dearth.

Most holy Spirit, first Self-conqueror ;
 Thou Victress over Time and Destiny
 And Evil, in the all-deciding war
 So fierce, so long, so dreadful! — Would that me
 Thou hadst upgathered in my life's pure morn!
 Unworthy then, less worthy now, forlorn,
 I dare not, Gracious Mother, call on Thee.

Next Thou, O sibyl, sorceress and queen,
 Our Lady of Annihilation, Thou!
 Of mighty stature, of demoniac mien ;
 Upon whose swathy face and livid brow
 Are graven deeply anguish, malice, scorn,
 Strength ravaged by unrest, resolve forlorn
 Of any hope, dazed pride that will not bow.

Thy form is clothed with wings of iron gloom ;
 But round about thee, like a chain, is rolled,
 Cramping the sway of every mighty plume,
 A stark constringent serpent fold on fold :
 Of its two heads, one sting is in thy brain,
 The other in thy heart ; their venom-pain
 Like fire distilling through thee uncontrolled.

A rod of serpents wieldeth thy right hand ;
 Thy left a cup of raging fire, whose light
 Burns lurid on thyself as thou dost stand ;
 Thy lidless eyes tenebriously bright ;
 Thy wings, thy vestures, thy dishevelled hair
 Dark as the Grave ; thou statue of Despair,
 Thou Night essential radiating night.

TO OUR LADIES OF DEATH

Thus have I seen thee in thine actual form ;
Not thus can see thee those whom thou dost sway,
Inscrutable Enchantress : young and warm,
Pard-beautiful and brilliant, ever gay ;
Thy cup the very Wine of Life, thy rod
The wand of more voluptuous spells than God
Can wield in Heaven ; thus charimest thou thy prey.

The selfish, fatuous, proud, and pitiless,
All who have falsified life's royal trust ;
The strong whose strength hath basked in idleness,
The great heart given up to worldly lust,
The great mind destitute of moral faith ;
Thou scourgest down to Night and utter Death,
Or penal spheres of retribution just.

O mighty Spirit, fraudulent and malign,
Demon of madness and perversity !
The evil passions which may make me thine
Are not yet irrepressible in me ;
And I have pierced thy mark of riant youth,
And seen thy form in all its hideous truth :
I will not, Dreadful Mother, call on Thee.

Last Thou, retirèd nun and throneless queen,
Our Lady of Oblivion, last Thou :
Of human stature, of abstracted mien ;
Upon whose pallid face and drooping brow
Are shadowed melancholy dreams of Doom,
And deep absorption into silent gloom,
And weary bearing of the heavy Now.

Thou art all shrouded in a gauzy veil,
 Sombrous and cloudlike ; all, except that face
 Of subtle loveliness though weirdly pale.

Thy soft, slow-gliding footsteps leave no trace,
 And stir no sound. Thy drooping hands infold
 Their frail white fingers ; and, unconscious, hold
 A poppy-wreath, thine anodyne of grace.

Thy hair is like a twilight round thy head :
 Thine eyes are shadowed wells, from Lethe-stream
 With drowsy subterranean waters fed ;
 Obscurely deep, without a stir or gleam ;
 The gazer drinks in from them with his gaze
 An opiate charm to curtain all his days,
 A passive languor of oblivious dream.

Thou hauntest twilight regions, and the trance
 Of moonless nights when stars are few and wan :
 Within black woods ; or over the expanse
 Of desert seas abysmal ; or upon
 Old solitary shores whose populous graves
 Are rocked in rest by ever-moaning waves ;
 Or through vast ruined cities still and lone.

The weak, the weary, and the desolate,
 The poor, the mean, the outcast, the opprest,
 All trodden down beneath the march of Fate,
 Thou gatherest, loving Sister, to thy breast,
 Soothing their pain and weariness asleep ;
 Then in thy hidden Dreamland hushed and deep
 Dost lay them, shrouded in eternal rest.

TO OUR LADIES OF DEATH

O sweetest Sister, and sole Patron Saint
Of all the humble eremites who flee
From out life's crowded tumult, stunned and faint,
To seek a stern and lone tranquillity
In Libyan wastes of time : my hopeless life
With famished yearning craveth rest from strife ;
Therefore, thou Restful One, I call on Thee !

Take me, and lull me into perfect sleep ;
Down, down, far-hidden in thy duskiest cave ;
While all the clamorous years above me sweep
Unheard, or, like the voice of seas that rave
On far-off coasts, but murmuring o'er my trance,
A dim vast monotone, that shall enhance
The restful rapture of the inviolate grave.

Ungathered thus in thy divine embrace,
Upon mine eyes thy soft mesmeric hand,
While wreaths of opiate odour interlace
About my pulseless brow ; babe-pure and bland,
Passionless, senseless, thoughtless, let me dream
Some ever-slumbrous, never-varying theme,
Within the shadow of thy Timeless Land.

That when I thus have drunk my inmost fill
Of perfect peace, I may arise renewed ;
In soul and body, intellect and will,
Equal to cope with Life whate'er its mood ;
To sway its storm and energise its calm ;
Through rhythmic years evolving like a psalm
Of infinite love and faith and sanctitude.

But if this cannot be, no less I cry,
 Come, lead me with thy terrorless control
 Down to our Mother's bosom, there to die
 By abdication of my separate soul :
 So shall this single, self-impelling piece
 Of mechanism from lone labour cease,
 Resolving into union with the Whole.

Our Mother feedeth thus our little life,
 That we in turn may feed her with our death :
 The great Sea sways, one interwoven strife,
 Wherefrom the Sun exhales a subtle breath,
 To float the heavens sublime in form and hue,
 Then turning cold and dark in order due
 Rain weeping back to swell the Sea beneath.

One part of me shall feed a little worm,
 And it a bird on which a man may feed ;
 One lime the mould, one nourish insect-sperm ;
 One thrill sweet grass, one pulse in bitter weed ;
 This swell a fruit, and that evolve in air ;
 Another trickle to a springlet's lair,
 Another paint a daisy on the mead :

With cosmic interchange of parts for all,
 Through all the modes of being numberless
 Of every element, as may befall.
 And if earth's general soul hath consciousness,
 Their new life must with strange new joy be thrilled,
 Of perfect law all perfectly fulfilled ;
 No sin, no fear, no failure, no excess.

TO OUR LADIES OF DEATH

Weary of living isolated life,
Weary of hoping hopes for ever vain,
Weary of struggling in all-sterile strife,
Weary of thought which maketh nothing plain,
I close my eyes and hush my panting breath,
And yearn for Thee, divinely tranquil Death,
To come and soothe away my bitter pain.

1861.

INSOMNIA

“ Sleepless himself to give to others sleep.”

“ He giveth His beloved sleep.”

I HEARD the sounding of the midnight hour ;
The others one by one had left the room,
In calm assurance that the gracious power
Of sleep's fine alchemy would bless the gloom,
Transmuting all its leaden weight to gold,
To treasures of rich virtues manifold,
New strength, new health, new life ;
Just weary enough to nestle softly, sweetly,
Into divine unconsciousness, completely
Delivered from the world of toil and care and strife.

Just weary enough to feel assured of rest,
Of Sleep's divine oblivion and repose,
Renewing heart and brain for richer zest
Of waking life when golden morning glows,
As young and pure and glad as if the first
That ever on the void of darkness burst
With ravishing warmth and light ;
On dewy grass and flowers and blithe birds singing,
And shining waters, all enraptured springing,
Fragrance and shine and song, out of the womb of night.

But I with infinite weariness outworn,
Haggard with endless nights unblessed by sleep,
Ravaged by thoughts unutterably forlorn,
Plunged in despairs unfathomably deep,

INSOMNIA

Went cold and pale and trembling with affright
Into the desert vastitude of Night,
 Arid and wild and black;
Foreboding no oasis of sweet slumber,
Counting beforehand all the countless number
Of sands that are its minutes on my desolate track.

And so I went, the last, to my drear bed,
 Aghast as one who should go down to lie
Among the blissfully unconscious dead,
 Assured that as the endless years flowed by
Over the dreadful silence and deep gloom
And dense oppression of the stifling tomb,
 He only of them all,
Nerveless and impotent to madness, never
Could hope oblivion's perfect trance for ever:
An agony of life eternal in death's pall.

But that would be for ever, without cure! —
 And yet the agony be not more great;
Supreme fatigue and pain, while they endure,
 Into Eternity their time translate;
Be it of hours and days or countless years,
And boundless æons, it alike appears
 To the crushed victim's soul;
Utter despair foresees no termination,
 But feels itself of infinite duration;
The smallest fragment instant comprehends the whole.

The absolute of torture as of bliss
 Is timeless, each transcending time and space;

The one an infinite obscure abyss,

The other an eternal Heaven of grace.—
 Keeping a little lamp of glimmering light
 Companion through the horror of the night,

I laid me down aghast

As *he* of all who pass death's quiet portal
 Malignantly reserved alone immortal,

In consciousness of bale that must for ever last.

I laid me down and closed my heavy eyes,

As if sleep's mockery might win true sleep ;
 And grew aware, with awe but not surprise,

Blindly aware through all the silence deep,
 Of some dark Presence watching by my bed,
 The awful image of a nameless dread ;

But I lay still fordone ;

And felt its Shadow on me dark and solemn
 And steadfast as a monumental column,

And thought drear thoughts of Doom, and heard the
 bells chime One.

And then I raised my weary eyes and saw,

By some slant moonlight on the ceiling thrown
 And faint lamp-gleam, that Image of my awe,

Still as a pillar of basaltic stone,
 But all enveloped in a sombre shroud

Except the wan face drooping heavy-browed,
 With sad eyes fixed on mine ;

Sad weary yearning eyes, but fixed remorseless
 Upon my eyes yet wearier, that were forceless

To bear the cruel pressure ; cruel, unmalign.

Wherefore I asked for what I knew too well :

O ominous midnight Presence, What art Thou
Where to in tones that sounded like a knell :

“I am the Second Hour, appointed now
To watch beside thy slumberless unrest.”

Then I : Thus both, unlike, alike unblest ;

For I should sleep, you fly :

Are not those wings beneath thy mantle moulded ?

O Hour ! unfold those wings so straightly folded,
And urge thy natural flight beneath the moonlit sky.

“ My wings shall open when your eyes shall close

In real slumber from this waking drear ;

Your wild unrest is my enforced repose ;

Ere I move hence you must not know me here.”

Could not your wings fan slumber through my brain,

Soothing away its weariness and pain ?

“ Your sleep must stir my wings :

Sleep, and I bear you gently on my pinions

Athwart my span of hollow night's dominions,

Whence hour on hour shall bear to morning's golden
springs.”

That which I ask of you, you ask of me,

O weary Hour, thus standing sentinel

Against your nature, as I feel and see

Against my own your form immovable :

Could I bring Sleep to set you on the wing,

What other thing so gladly would I bring ?

Truly the poet saith :

If that is best whose absence we deplore most,
 Whose presence in our longings is the foremost,
 What blessings equal Sleep save only love and death?

I let my lids fall, sick of thought and sense,
 But felt that Shadow heavy on my heart;
 And saw the night before me an immense
 Black waste of ridge-walls, hour by hour apart,
 Dividing deep ravines: from ridge to ridge
 Sleep's flying hour was an aërial bridge;
 But I, whose hours stood fast,
 Must climb down painfully each steep side hither,
 And climb more painfully each steep side thither,
 And so make one hour's span for years of travail last.

Thus I went down into that first ravine,
 Wearily, slowly, blindly, and alone,
 Staggering, stumbling, sinking depths unseen,
 Shaken and bruised and gashed by stub and stone;
 And at the bottom paven with slipperiness,
 A torrent-brook rushed headlong with such stress
 Against my feeble limbs,
 Such fury of wave and foam and icy bleakness
 Buffeting insupportably my weakness
 That when I would recall dazed memory swirls and
 swims.

How I got through I know not, faint as death;
 And then I had to climb the awful scarp,
 Creeping with many a pause for panting breath,
 Clinging to tangled root and rock-jut sharp;

INSOMNIA

Perspiring with faint chills instead of heat,
Trembling, and bleeding hands and knees and feet ;
 Falling, to rise anew ;
Until, with lamentable toil and travel
Upon the ridge of arid sand and gravel
I lay supine half-dead and heard the bells chime Two ;

And knew a change of Watchers in the room
 Without a stir or sound beside my bed ;
Only the tingling silence of the gloom,
 The muffled pulsing of the night's deep dread ;
And felt an image mightier to appal,
And looked ; the moonlight on the bed-foot wall
 And corniced ceiling white
Was slanting now ; and in the midst stood solemn
And hopeless as a black sepulchral column
A steadfast shrouded Form, the Third Hour of the
 night.

The fixed regard implacably austere,
 Yet none the less ineffably forlorn.
Something transcending all my former fear
 Came jarring through my shattered frame out-
 worn :
I knew that crushing rock could not be stirred ;
I had no heart to say a single word,
 But closed my eyes again :
And set me shuddering to the task stupendous
Of climbing down and up that gulf tremendous
Unto the next hour-ridge beyond Hope's farthest ken.

Men sigh and plain and wail how life is brief :

Ah yes, our bright eternities of bliss
Are transient, rare, minute beyond relief,

Mere star-dust meteors in Time's night-abyss ;

Ah no, our black eternities intense

Of bale are lasting, dominant, immense,

As time which is their breath ;

The memory of the bliss is yearning sorrow,

The memory of the bale clouds every morrow

Darkening through nights and days unto the night of
Death.

No human words could paint my travail sore

In the thick darkness of the next ravine,
Deeper immeasurably than that before :

When hideous agonies, unheard, unseen,

In overwhelming floods of torture roll,

And horrors of great darkness drown the soul,

To be is not to be

In memory save as ghastliest impression,

And chaos of demoniacal possession. . . .

I shuddered on the ridge, and heard the bells chime
Three.

And like a pillar of essential gloom,

Most terrible in stature and regard,

Black in the moonlight filling all the room

The image of the Fourth Hour, evil-starred,

Stood over me ; but there was Something more,

Something behind It undiscerned before,

More dreadful than Its dread,
 Which overshadowed it as with a fateful
 Inexorable fascination hateful, —
 A wan and formless Shade from regions of the dead.

I shut my eyes against that spectral Shade,
 Which yet allured me with a deadly charm ;
 And that black Image of the Hour, dismayed
 By such tremendous menacing of harm ;
 And so into the gulf as into Hell ;
 Where what immeasurable depths I fell,
 With seizures of the heart
 Whose each clutch seemed the end of all pulsation,
 And tremors of exanimate prostration,
 Are horrors in my soul that never can depart.

If I for hope or wish had any force,
 It was that I might rush down sharply hurled
 From rock to rock until a mangled corse
 Down with the fury of the torrent whirled,
 The fury of black waters and white foam,
 To where the homeless find their only home,
 In the immense void Sea,
 Whose isles are worlds, surrounding, unsurrounded,
 Whose depths no mortal plummet ever sounded,
 Beneath all surface storm calm in Eternity.

Such hope or wish was as a feeble spark,
 A little lamp's pale glimmer in a tomb,
 To just reveal the hopeless deadly dark
 And wordless horrors of my soul's fixed doom :

Yet some mysterious instinct obstinate,
 Blindly unconscious as a law of Fate,
 Still urged me on and bore
 My shattered being through the unfeared peril
 Of death less hateful than the life as sterile !
 I shuddered on the ridge, and heard the bells chime
 Four.

The Image of that Fifth Hour of the night
 Was blacker in the moonlight now aslant
 Upon its left than on its shrouded right !
 And over and behind it, dominant,
 The shadow not Its shadow cast its spell,
 Most vague and dim and wan and terrible,
 Death's ghastly aureole,
 Pregnant with overpowering fascination,
 Commanding by repulsive instigation,
 Despair's envenomed anodyne to tempt the Soul.

I closed my eyes, but could no longer keep
 Under that Image and most awful Shade,
 Supine in mockery of blissful sleep,
 Delirious with such fierce thirst unallayed :
 Of all worst agonies the most unblest
 Is passive agony of wild unrest :
 Trembling and faint I rose,
 And dressed with painful efforts, and descended
 With furtive footsteps and with breath suspended,
 And left the slumbering house with my unslumbering
 woes.

INSOMNIA

Constrained to move through the unmoving hours,
Accurst from rest because the hours stood still ;
Feeling the hands of the Infernal Powers
Heavy upon me for enormous ill,
Inscrutable intolerable pain,
Against which mortal pleas and prayers are vain,
Gaspings of dying breath,
And human struggles, dying spasms yet vainer :
Renounce defence when Doom is the Arraigner ;
Let impotence of Life subside appeased in Death.

I paced the silent and deserted streets
In cold dark shade and chillier moonlight grey ;
Pondering a dolorous series of defeats
And black disasters from life's opening day,
Invested with the shadow of a doom
That filled the Spring and Summer with a gloom
Most wintry bleak and drear ;
Gloom from within as from a sulphurous censer
Making the glooms without for ever denser,
To blight the buds and flowers and fruitage of my year.

Against a bridge's stony parapet
I leaned, and gazed into the waters black ;
And marked an angry morning red and wet
Beneath a livid and enormous rack
Glare out confronting the belated moon,
Huddled and wan and feeble as the swoon
Of featureless Despair :

When some stray workman, half-asleep but lusty,
 Passed urgent through the rainpour wild and gusty,
 I felt a ghost already, planted watching there.

As phantom to its grave, or to its den
 Some wild beast of the night when night is sped,
 I turned unto my homeless home again

To front a day only less charged with dread
 Than that dread night ; and after day, to front
 Another night of — what would be the brunt ?

I put the thought aside,
 To be resumed when common life unfolded
 In common daylight had my brain remoulded ;
 Meanwhile the flaws of rain refreshed and fortified.

The day passed, and the night ; and other days,
 And other nights ; and all of evil doom ;
 The sun-hours in a sick bewildering haze,
 The star-hours in a thick enormous gloom,
 With rending lightnings and with thunder-knells ;
 The ghastly hours of all the timeless Hells : —
 Bury them with their bane !

I look back on the words already written,
 And writhe by cold rage stung, by self-scorn smitten,
 They are so weak and vain and infinitely inane. . . .

“How from those hideous Malebolges deep
 I ever could win back to upper earth,
 Restored to human nights of blessed sleep
 And healthy waking with the new day’s birth ? ” —

INSOMNIA

How do men climb back from a swoon whose stress,
Crushing far deeper than all consciousness,
 Is deep as deep death seems?
Who can the steps and stages mete and number
By which we re-emerge from nightly slumber? —
Our poor vast petty life is one dark maze of dreams.

March 1882.

HE HEARD HER SING

WE were now in the midmost Maytime, in the full
green flood of the Spring,
When the air is sweet all the daytime with the
blossoms and birds that sing ;
When the air is rich all the night, and richest of all in
its noon
When the nightingales pant the delight and keen
stress of their love to the moon ;
When the almond and apple and pear spread wavering
wavelets of snow
In the light of the soft warm air far-flushed with a
delicate glow ;
When the towering chestnuts uphold their masses of
spires red or white,
And the pendulous tresses of gold of the slim labur-
num burn bright,
And the lilac guardeth the bowers with the gleam of
a lifted spear,
And the scent of the hawthorn flowers breathes all the
new life of the year,
And the linden's tender pink bud by the green of the
leaf is o'errun,
And the bronze-beech shines like blood in the light
of the morning sun,
And the leaf-buds seem spangling some network of
gossamer flung on the elm,

HE HEARD HER SING

And the hedges are filling their fretwork with every
sweet green of Spring's realm ;
And the flowers are everywhere budding and blowing
about our feet,
The green of the meadows star-studding and the
bright green blades of the wheat.

An evening and night of song. For first when I left
the town,
And took the lane that is long and came out on the
breeze-swept down,
The sunset heavens were all ringing wide over the
golden gorse
With the skylarks' rapturous singing, a revel of larks
in full force,
A revel of larks in the raptures surpassing all rap-
tures of Man,
Who ponders the blessings he captures and finds in
each blessing some ban.
And then I went on down the dale in the light of
the afterglow,
In that strange light green and pale and serene and
pathetic and slow
In its fading round to the north, while the light of
the unseen moon
From the east comes brightening forth an ever-
increasing boon.
And there in the cottage my Alice, through the
hours so short and so long,

Kept filled to the brim love's chalice with the wine
of music and song :
And first with colossal Beethoven, the gentlest spirit
sublime
Of the harmonies interwoven, Eternity woven with
Time ;
Of the melodies slowly and slowly dissolving away
through the soul,
While it dissolves with them wholly and our being is
lost in the Whole ;
As gentle as Dante the Poet, for only the lulls of
the stress
Of the mightiest spirits can know it, this ineffable
gentleness :
And then with the delicate tender fantastic dreamer
of night,
Whose splendour is starlike splendour and his light
a mystic moonlight,
Nocturn on nocturn dreaming while the mind floats
far in the haze
And the dusk and the shadow and gleaming of a
realm that has no days :
And then she sang ballads olden, ballads of love and
of woe,
Love all burningly golden, grief with heart's-blood in
its flow ;
Those ballads of Scotland that thrill you, keen from
the heart to the heart,
Till their pathos is seeming to kill you, with an
exquisite bliss in the smart.

HE HEARD HER SING

And then we went out of the valley and over the spur
of the hill,
And down by a woodland alley where the sprinkled
moonlight lay still ;
For the breeze in the boughs was still and the breeze
was still in the sprays,
And the leaves had scarcely a thrill in the stream of
the silver rays,
But looked as if drawn on the sky or etched with a
graver keen,
Sharp shadows thrown from on high deep out of the
azure serene :
And a certain copse we knew, where never in May-
time fails,
While the night distils sweet dew, the song of the
nightingales :
And there together we heard the lyrical drama of
love
Of the wonderful passionate bird which swelleth the
heart so above
All other thought of this life, all other care of this
earth,
Be it of pleasure or strife, be it of sorrow or mirth,
Saving the one intense imperious passion supreme
Kindling the soul and the sense, making the world
but a dream,
The dream of an aching delight and a yearning afar
and afar,
While the music thrills all the void night to the
loftiest pulsating star : —

“ Love, love only, for ever ; love with its torture and
bliss ;
All the world’s glories can never equal two souls in
one kiss.”

And when I had bidden farewell to my Love at the
cottage door,
For a night and a day farewell, for a night and a day
and no more,
I went down to the shining strand of our own beloved
bay,
To the shore of soft white sand caressed by the pure
white spray,
In the arms of the hills serene, clothed from the base
to the crest
With garments of manifold green, curving to east and
to west ;
And high in the pale blue south where the clouds
were white as wool,
Over the little bay-mouth the moon shone near the
full ;
And I walked by the waves’ soft moan, for my heart
was beyond control,
And I needed to be alone with the night and my love
and my soul,
And I could not think of sleep in the moonlight broad
and clear,
For a music solemn and deep filled all my spirit’s
sphere,

HE HEARD HER SING

A music interwoven of all that night I had heard,
From the music of mighty Beethoven to the song of
the little brown bird.

And thus as I paced the shore beneath the azure abyss,
And my soul thrilled more and more with a yearning
and sadness of bliss,
A voice came over the water from over the eastern cape,
Like the voice of some ocean daughter wailing a
lover's escape, —
A voice so plaintive and distant, as faint as a wounded
dove,
Whose wings are scarcely resistant to the air beneath
and above,
Wavering, panting, urging from the farthest east to
the west,
Over some wild sea surging in the hope forlorn of its
nest;
A voice that quivered and trembled, with falls of a
broken heart,
And then like that dove reassembled its forces to play
out its part;
Till it came to a fall that was dying, the end of an
infinite grief,
A sobbing and throbbing and sighing that death was
a welcome relief
And so there was silence once more, and the moon-
light looked sad as a pall,
And I stood entranced on the shore and marvelled
what next would befall.

And thus all-expectant abiding I waited not long, for
soon

A boat came gliding and gliding out in the light of
the moon,

Gliding with muffled oars, slowly, a thin dark line,
Round from the shadowing shores into the silver shine
Of the clear moon westering now, and still drew on
and on,

While the water before its prow breaking and glistening
shone,

Slowly in silence strange ; and the rower rowed till it
lay

Afloat within easy range deep in the curve of the bay ;
And besides the rower were two ; a Woman, who sat
in the stern,

And Her by her fame I knew, one of those fames that
burn,

Startling and kindling the world, one whose likeness
we everywhere see ;

And a man reclining half-curved with an indolent grace
at her knee,

The Signor, lord of her choice ; and he lightly touched
a guitar ;—

A guitar for that glorious voice ! Illumine the sun
with a star !

She sat superb and erect, stately, all-happy, serene,
Her right hand toying unchecked with the hair of that
page of a Queen ;

With her head and her throat and her bust like the
bust and the throat and the head

HE HEARD HER SING

Of Her who has long been dust, of her who shall
never be dead,
Preserved by the potent art made trebly potent by love,
While the transient ages depart from under the
heavens above, —
Preserved in the colour and line on the canvas fulgently
flung
By Him the Artist divine who triumphed and vanished
so young :
Surely there rarely hath been a lot more to be envied
in life
Than thy lot, O FORNARINA, whom RAPHAEL'S heart
took to wife.

There was silence yet for a time save the tinkling
capricious and quaint,
Then She lifted her voice sublime, no longer tender
and faint,
Pathetic and tremulous, no ! but firm as a column it rose,
Rising solemn and slow with a full rich swell to the
close,
Firm as a marble column soaring with noble pride
In a triumph of rapture solemn to some Hero deified ;
In a rapture of exultation made calm by its stress
intense,
In a triumph of consecration and a jubilation immense.
And the Voice flowed on and on, and ever it swelled
as it poured,
Till the stars that throbbed as they shone seemed
throbbing with it in accord ;

Till the moon herself in my dream, still Empress of
all the night,
Was only that voice supreme translated into pure
light :
And I lost all sense of the earth though I still had
sense of the sea ;
And I saw the stupendous girth of a tree like the
Norse World-Tree ;
And its branches filled all the sky, and the deep sea
watered its root,
And the clouds were its leaves on high and the stars
were its silver fruit ;
Yet the stars were the notes of the singing and the
moon was the voice of the song,
Through the vault of the firmament ringing and swell-
ing resistlessly strong ;
And the whole vast night was a shell for that music
of manifold might,
And was strained by the stress of the swell of the
music yet vaster than night.
And I saw as a crystal fountain whose shaft was a
column of light
More high than the loftiest mountain ascend the abyss
of the night ;
And its spray filled all the sky, and the clouds were
the clouds of its spray,
Which glittered in star-points on high and filled with
pure silver the bay ;
And ever in rising and falling it sang as it rose and it
fell,

HE HEARD HER SING

And the heavens with their pure azure walling all
pulsed with the pulse of its swell,
For the stars were the notes of the singing and the
moon was the voice of the song
Through the vault of the firmament ringing and swell-
ing ineffably strong!
And the whole vast night was a shell for that music of
manifold might,
And was strained by the stress of the swell of the
music yet vaster than night :
And the fountain in swelling and soaring and filling
beneath and above,
Grew flushed with red fire in outpouring, transmuting
great power into love,
Great power with a greater love flushing, immense and
intense and supreme,
As if all the World's heart-blood outgushing ensan-
guined the trance of my dream ;
And the waves of its blood seemed to dash on the
shore of the sky to the cope
With the stress of the fire of a passion and yearning of
limitless scope.
Vast fire of a passion and yearning, keen torture of
rapture intense,
A most unendurable burning consuming the soul with
the sense : —
“ Love, love only, for ever ; love with its torture of
bliss ;
All the world's glories can never equal two souls in
one kiss :

Love, and ever love wholly; love in all time and all
 space;
 Life is consummate then solely in the death of a burn-
 ing embrace."

And at length when that Voice sank mute, and silence
 fell over all
 Save the tinkling thin of that lute, the deep heavens
 rushed down like a pall,
 The stars and the moon for a time with all their
 splendours of light,
 Were quenched with that Voice sublime, and great
 darkness filled the night
 When I felt again the scent of the night-flowers rich and
 sweet,
 As ere my senses went, and knew where I stood on my
 feet,
 And saw the yet-bright bay and the moon gone low in
 my dream,
 The boat had passed away with Her the Singer
 supreme;
 She was gone, the marvellous Singer whose wonder-
 ful world-wide fame
 Could never possibly bring her a tithe of her just
 acclaim.
 And I wandered all night in a trance of rapture and
 yearning and love,
 And saw the dim grey expanse flush far with the
 dawning above;

HE HEARD HER SING

And I passed that copse in the night, but the nightin-
gales all were dumb
From their passionate aching delight, and perhaps
whoever should come
On the morrow would find, I have read, under its bush
or its tree
Some poor little brown bird dead, dead of its melody,
Slain by the agitation, by the stress and the strain of
the strife,
And the pang of the vain emulation in the music yet
dearer than life.
And I heard the skylarks singing high in the morning
sun,
All the sunrise heavens ringing as the sunset heavens
had done :
And ever I dreamed and pondered while over the
fragrant soil,
My happy footsteps wandered before I resumed my
toil :—
Truly, my darling, my Alice, truly the whole night
long
Have I filled to the brim love's chalice with the wine
of music and song.
I have passed and repassed your door from the sing-
ing until the dawn
A dozen times and more, and ever the curtains drawn ;
And now that the morn is breaking out of the stillness
deep,
Sweet as my visions of waking be all your visions of
sleep !

Could you but wake, O my dearest, a moment, and
 give one glance,
 Just a furtive peep the merest, to learn the day's
 advance !
 For I must away up the dale and over the hill to my
 toil,
 And the night's rich dreams grow pale in the working
 day's turmoil ;
 But to-night, O my darling, my Alice, till night it will
 not be long,
 We will fill to the brim love's chalice with the wine of
 music and song ;
 And never the memory fails of what I have learnt in
 my dream
 From the song of the nightingales and the song of the
 Singer supreme : —
 " Love, love only, for ever ; love with its torture and
 bliss ;
 All the world's glories can never equal two souls in one
 kiss :
 Love, love ever and wholly ; love in all time and all
 space ;
 Love is consummate then solely in the death of a burn-
 ing embrace."

February 1882.

IN THE ROOM

“Ceste insigne fable et tragicque comedie.”

RABELAIS.

I

THE sun was down, and twilight grey
Filled half the air; but in the room,
Whose curtain had been drawn all day,
The twilight was a dusky gloom:
Which seemed at first as still as death,
And void; but was indeed all rife
With subtle thrills, the pulse and breath
Of multitudinous lower life.

II

In their abrupt and headlong way
Bewildered flies for light had dashed
Against the curtain all the day,
And now slept wintrily abashed;
And nimble mice slept, wearied out
With such a double night's uproar;
But sly beetles crawled about
The chilly hearth and naked floor.

III

And so throughout the twilight hour
That vaguely murmurous hush and rest
There brooded; and beneath its power
Life throbbing held its throbs suppress:

Until the thin-voiced mirror sighed,
 I am all blurred with dust and damp,
 So long ago the clear day died,
 So long has gleamed nor fire nor lamp.

IV

Whereon the curtain murmured back,
 Some change is on us, good or ill ;
 Behind me and before is black
 As when those human things lie still :
 But I have seen the darkness grow
 As grows the daylight every morn ;
 Have felt out there long shine and glow,
 In here long chilly dusk forlorn.

V

The cupboard grumbled with a groan,
 Each new day worse starvation brings :
 Since *he* came here I have not known
 Or sweets or cates or wholesome things :
 But now ! a pinch of meal, a crust,
 Throughout the week is all I get.
 I am so empty ; it is just
 As when they said we were to let.

VI

What is become, then, of our Man ?
 The petulant old glass exclaimed ;
 If all this time he slumber can,
 He really ought to be ashamed.

I wish we had our Girl again,
So gay and busy, bright and fair :
The girls are better than these men,
Who only for their dull selves care.

VII

It is so many hours ago —
The lamp and fire were both alight —
I saw him pacing to and fro,
Perturbing restlessly the night.
His face was pale to give one fear,
His eyes when lifted looked too bright ;
He muttered ; what, I could not hear :
Bad words though ; something was not right.

VIII

The table said, He wrote so long
That I grew weary of his weight ;
The pen kept up a cricket song,
It ran and ran at such a rate :
And in the longer pauses he
With both his folded arms downpressed,
And stared as one who does not see,
Or sank his head upon his breast.

IX

The fire-grate said, I am as cold
As if I never had a blaze ;
The few dead cinders here I hold,
I held unburned for days and days.

Last night he made them flare ; but still
 What good did all his writing do ?
 Among my ashes curl and thrill
 Thin ghosts of all those papers too.

X

The table answered, Not quite all ;
 He saved and folded up one sheet,
 And sealed it fast, and let it fall ;
 And here it lies now white and neat.
 Whereon the letter's whisper came,
 My writing is closed up too well ;
 Outside there's not a single name,
 And who should read me I can't tell.

XI

The mirror sneered with scornful spite,
 (That ancient crack which spoiled her looks
 Had marred her temper), Write and write !
 And read those stupid, worn-out books !
 That's all he does, read, write, and read,
 And smoke that nasty pipe which stinks :
 He never takes the slightest heed
 How any of us feels or thinks.

XII

But Lucy fifty times a day
 Would come and smile here in my face,
 Adjust a tress that curled astray,
 Or tie a ribbon with more grace :

She looked so young and fresh and fair,
 She blushed with such a charming bloom,
It did one good to see her there,
 And brightened all things in the room.

XIII

She did not sit hours stark and dumb
 As pale as moonshine by the lamp ;
To lie in bed when day was come,
 And leave us curtained chill and damp.
She slept away the dreary dark,
 And rose to greet the pleasant morn ;
And sang as gaily as a lark
 While busy as the flies sun-born.

XIV

And how she loved us every one ;
 And dusted this and mended that,
With trills and laughs and freaks of fun,
 And tender scoldings in her chat !
And then her bird, that sang as shrill
 As she sang sweet ; her darling flowers
That grew there in the window-sill,
 Where she would sit at work for hours.

XV

It was not much she ever wrote ;
 Her fingers had good work to do ;
Say, once a week a pretty note ;
 And very long it took her too.

And little more she read, I wis ;
 Just now and then a pictured sheet,
 Besides those letters she would kiss
 And croon for hours, they were so sweet.

XVI

She had her friends too, blithe young girls,
 Who whispered, babbled, laughed, caressed,
 And romped and danced with dancing curls,
 And gave our life a joyous zest.
 But with this dullard, glum and sour,
 Not one of all his fellow-men
 Has ever passed a social hour ;
 We might be in some wild beast's den.

XVII

This long tirade aroused the bed,
 Who spoke in deep and ponderous bass,
 Befitting that calm life he led,
 As if firm-rooted in his place :
 In broad majestic bulk alone,
 As in thrice venerable age,
 He stood at once the royal throne,
 The monarch, the experienced sage :

XVIII

I know what is and what has been ;
 Not anything to me comes strange,
 Who in so many years have seen
 And lived through every kind of change.

I know when men are good or bad,
When well or ill, he slowly said ;
When sad or glad, when sane or mad,
And when they sleep alive or dead.

XIX

At this last word of solemn lore
A tremor circled through the gloom,
As if a crash upon the floor
Had jarred and shaken all the room :
For nearly all the listening things
Were old and worn, and knew what curse
Of violent change death often brings,
From good to bad, from bad to worse ;

XX

They get to know each other well,
To feel at home and settled down ;
Death bursts among them like a shell,
And strews them over all the town.
The bed went on, This man who lies
Upon me now is stark and cold ;
He will not any more arise,
And do the things he did of old.

XXI

But we shall have short peace or rest ;
For soon up here will come a rout,
And nail him in a queer long chest,
And carry him like luggage out.

They will be muffled all in black,
 And whisper much, and sigh and weep :
 But he will never more come back,
 And some one else in me must sleep.

XXII

Thereon a little phial shrilled,
 Here empty on the chair I lie :
 I heard one say, as I was filled,
 With half of this a man would die.
 The man there drank me with slow breath,
 And murmured, Thus ends barren strife :
 O sweeter, thou cold wine of death,
 Than ever sweet warm wine of life.

XXIII

One of my cousins long ago,
 A little thing, the mirror said,
 Was carried to a couch to show,
 Whether a man was really dead.
 Two great improvements marked the case :
 He did not blur her with his breath,
 His many-wrinkled, twitching face
 Was smooth old ivory : verdict, Death. —

XXIV

It lay, the lowest thing there, lulled
 Sweet-sleep-like in corruption's truce ;
 The form whose purpose was annulled,
 While all the other shapes meant use.

It lay, the *he* become now *it*,
Unconscious of the deep disgrace,
Unanxious how its parts might flit
Through what new forms in time and space.

XXV

It lay and preached, as dumb things do,
More powerfully than tongues can prate ;
Though life be torture through and through,
Man is but weak to plain of fate :
The drear path crawls on drearier still
To wounded feet and hopeless breast ?
Well, he can lie down when he will,
And straight all ends in endless rest.

XXVI

And while the black night nothing saw,
And till the cold morn came at last,
That old bed held the room in awe
With tales of its experience vast.
It thrilled the gloom ; it told such tales
Of human sorrows and delights,
Of fever moans and infant wails,
Of births and deaths and bridal nights.
1867-8.

A VOICE FROM THE THE NILE¹

I COME from mountains under other stars
Than those reflected in my waters here ;
Athwart broad realms, beneath large skies, I flow,
Between the Libyan and Arabian hills,
And merge at last into the great Mid Sea ;
And make this land of Egypt. All is mine :
The palm-trees and the doves among the palms,
The corn-fields and the flowers among the corn,
The patient oxen and the crocodiles,
The ibis and the heron and the hawk,
The lotus and the thick papyrus reeds,
The slant-sailed boats that flit before the wind
Or up my rapids ropes hale heavily ;
Yea, even all the massive temple-fronts
With all their columns and huge effigies,
The pyramids and Memnon and the Sphinx,
This Cairo and the City of the Greek
As Memphis and the hundred-gated Thebes,
Sais and Denderah of Isis queen ;
Have grown because I fed them with full life,
And flourish only while I feed them still.
For if I stint my fertilising flood,
Gaunt famine reaps among the sons of men
Who have not corn to reap for all they sowed,
And blight and languishment are everywhere ;
And when I have withdrawn or turned aside
To other realms my ever-flowing streams,

¹ Reprinted by permission from the *Fortnightly Review*.

The old realms withered from their old renown,
The sands came over them, the desert-sands
Incessantly encroaching, numberless
Beyond my water-drops, and buried them,
And all is silence, solitude, and death,
Exanimate silence while the waste winds howl
Over the sad immeasurable waste.

Dusk memories haunt me of an infinite past,
Ages and cycles brood above my springs,
Though I remember not my primal birth.
So ancient is my being and august,
I know not anything more venerable ;
Unless, perchance, the vaulting skies that hold
The sun and moon and stars that shine on me ;
The air that breathes upon me with delight ;
And Earth, All-Mother, all-beneficent,
Who held her mountains forth like opulent breasts
To cradle me and feed me with their snows,
And hollowed out the great sea to receive
My overplus of flowing energy :
Blessèd for ever be our Mother Earth.

Only, the mountains that must feed my springs
Year after year and every year with snows
As they have fed innumerable years,
These mountains they are evermore the same,
Rooted and motionless ; the solemn heavens
Are evermore the same in stable rest ;
The sun and moon and stars that shine on me

Are evermore the same although they move :
 I solely, moving ever without pause,
 Am evermore the same and not the same ;
 Pouring myself away into the sea,
 And self-renewing from the farthest heights ;
 Ever-fresh waters streaming down and down,
 The one old Nilus constant through their change.

The creatures also whom I breed and feed
 Perpetually perish and dissolve,
 And other creatures like them take their place,
 To perish in their turn and be no more :
 My affluent waters perish not from life,
 Absorbed into the ever-living sea
 Whose life is in their full replenishment.

Of all these creatures whom I breed and feed,
 One only with his works is strange to me,
 Is strange and admirable and pitiable,
 As homeless where all others are at home.
 My crocodiles are happy in my slime,
 And bask and seize their prey, each for itself,
 And leave their eggs to hatch in the hot sun,
 And die, their lives fulfilled, and are no more,
 And others bask and prey and leave their eggs.
 My doves they build their nests, each pair its own,
 And feed their callow young, each pair its own,
 None serves another, each one serves itself ;
 All glean alike about my fields of grain,
 And all the nests they build them are alike,

And are the self-same nests they built of old
Before the rearing of the pyramids,
Before great Hekatompylos was reared ;
Their cooing is the cooing soft and sweet
That murmured plaintively at evening-tide
In pillared Karnak as its pillars rose ;
And they are happy floating through my palms.

But Man, the admirable, the pitiable,
These sad-eyed peoples of the sons of men,
Are as the children of an alien race
Planted among my children, not at home,
Changelings aloof from all my family.
The one is servant and the other lord,
And many myriads serve a single lord :
So was it when the pyramids were reared,
And sphinxes and huge columns and wrought stones
Were haled long lengthening leagues adown my banks
By hundreds groaning with the stress of toil.
And groaning under the taskmaster's scourge,
With many falling foredone by the way,
Half-starved on lentils, onions, and scant bread ;
So is it now with these poor fellaheen
To whom my annual bounty brings fierce toil
With scarce enough of food to keep-in life.
They build mud huts and spacious palaces ;
And in the huts the moiling millions dwell,
And in the palaces their sumptuous lords
Pampered with all the choicest things I yield :
Most admirable, most pitiable Man.

Also their peoples ever are at war,
 Slaying and slain, burning and ravaging,
 And one yields to another and they pass,
 While I flow evermore the same great Nile,
 The ever-young and ever-ancient Nile :
 The swarthy is succeeded by the dusk,
 The dusky by the pale, the pale again
 By sunburned turbaned tribes long-linen-robed :
 And with these changes all things change and pass,
 All things but Me and this old Land of mine,
 Their dwellings, habitudes, and garbs, and tongues :
 I hear strange voices ;¹ never more the voice
 Austere priests chanted to the boat of death
 Gliding across the Acherusian lake,
 Or satraps parleyed in the Pharaoh's halls ;
 Never the voice of mad Cambyses' hosts,
 Never the voice of Alexander's Greece,
 Never the voice of Cæsar's haughty Rome :
 And with the peoples and the languages,
 With the great Empires still the great Creeds change ;
 They shift, they change, they vanish like thin dreams,
 As unsubstantial as the mists that rise
 After my overflow from out my fields,
 In silver fleeces, golden volumes, rise,
 And melt away before the mounting sun ;
 While I flow onward solely permanent
 Amidst their swiftly-passing pageantry.

¹ "and Nilus heareth strange voices." — *Sir Thomas Browne.*

Poor men, most admirable, most pitiable,
With all their changes all their great Creeds change :
For Man, this alien in my family,
Is alien most in this, to cherish dreams
And brood on visions of eternity,
And build religions in his brooding brain
And in the dark depths awe-full of his soul.
My other children live their little lives,
Are born and reach their prime and slowly fail,
And all their little lives are self-fulfilled ;
They die and are no more, content with age
And weary with infirmity. But Man
Has fear and hope and phantasy and awe,
And wistful yearnings and unsated loves,
That strain beyond the limits of his life,
And therefore Gods and Demons, Heaven and Hell :
This Man, the admirable, the pitiable.

Lo, I look backward some few thousand years,
And see men hewing temples in my rocks
With seated forms gigantic fronting them,
And solemn labyrinthine catacombs
With tombs all pictured with fair scenes of life
And scenes and symbols of mysterious death ;
And planting avenues of sphinxes forth,
Sphinxes couched calm, whose passionless regard
Sets timeless riddles to bewildered time,
Forth from my sacred banks to other fanes
Islanded in the boundless sea of air,
Upon whose walls and colonnades are carved

Tremendous hieroglyphs of secret things ;
 I see embalming of the bodies dead
 And judging of the disembodied souls ;
 I see the sacred animals alive,
 And statues of the various-headed gods,
 Among them throned a woman and a babe,
 The goddess crescent-horned, the babe divine ;
 Then I flow forward some few thousand years,
 And see new temples shining with all grace,
 Whose sculptured gods are beautiful human forms.
 Then I flow forward not a thousand years,
 And see again a woman and a babe,
 The woman haloed and the babe divine ;
 And everywhere that symbol of the cross
 I knew aforetime in the ancient days,
 The emblem then of life, but now of death.
 Then I flow forward some few hundred years,
 And see again the crescent, now supreme
 On lofty cupolas and minarets
 Whence voices sweet and solemn call to prayer.
 So the men change along my changeless stream,
 And change their faiths ; but I yield all alike
 Sweet water for their drinking, sweet as wine,
 And pure sweet water for their lustral rites :
 For thirty generations of my corn
 Outlast a generation of my men,
 And thirty generations of my men
 Outlast a generation of their gods :
 O admirable, pitiable Man,
 My child yet alien in my family.

A VOICE FROM THE NILE

And I through all these generations flow
Of corn and men and gods, all-bountiful,
Perennial through their transientness, still fed
By earth with waters in abundancy ;
And as I flowed here long before they were,
So may I flow when they no longer are,
Most like the serpent of eternity :
Blessèd for ever be our Mother Earth.

November 1881.

THE POET AND HIS MUSE

I SIGHED unto my Muse, "O gentle Muse,
Would you but come and kiss my aching brow,
And thus a little life and joy infuse
 Into my brain and heart so weary now ;
Into my heart so sad with emptiness
Even when unafflicted by the stress
 Of all our kind's poor life ;
Into my brain so feeble and so listless,
Crushed down by burthens of dark thought resistless
Of all our want and woe and unresulting strife.

" Would you but come and kiss me on the brow,
 Would you but kiss me on the pallid lips
That have so many years been songless now,
 And on the eyes involved in drear eclipse ;
That thus the barren brain long overwrought
Might yield again some blossoms of glad thought,
 And the long-mute lips sing,
And the long-arid eyes grow moist and tender
With some new vision of the ancient splendour
Of beauty and delight that lives in everything.

" Would you but kiss me on the silent lips
 And teach them thus to sing some new sweet
 song ;
Would you but kiss my eyes from their eclipse
 With some new tale of old-world right and wrong :

Some song of love and joy or tender grief
Whose sweetness is its own divine relief,
 Whose joy is golden bliss ;
Some solemn and impassioned antique story
Where love against dark doom burns out in glory,
Where life is freely staked to win one mutual kiss.

“ Would you but sing to me some new dear song
 Of love in bliss or bale alike supreme ;
Some story of our old-world right and wrong
 With noble passion burning through the theme :
What though the story be of darkest doom,
If loyal spirits shining through its gloom
 Throb to us from afar ?
What though the song with heavy sorrows languish,
If loving hearts pulse to us through its anguish ?
Is not the whole black night enriched by one pure
 star ? ”

And lo ! She came, the ever-gentle Muse,
 Sad as my heart, and languid as my brain ;
Too gentle in her loving to refuse,
 Although her steps were weariness and pain ;
Although her eyes were blank and lustreless,
Although her form was clothed with heaviness
 And drooped beneath the weight ;
Although her lips were blanched from all their
 blooming,
Her pure face pallid as from long entombing,
Her bright regard and smile sombre and desolate. —

“ Sad as thy heart and languid as thy brain
 I come unto thy sighing through the gloom,
 I come with mortal weariness and pain,
 I come as one compelled to leave her tomb :
 Behold, am I not wrapt as in the cloud
 Of death’s investiture and sombre shroud ?

Am I not wan as death !
 Look at the withered leafage of my garland,
 Is it not nightshade from the sad dim far land
 Of night and old oblivion and no mortal breath ?

“ I come unto thy sighing through the gloom,
 My hair dishevelled dank with dews of night,
 Reluctantly constrained to leave my tomb ;
 With eyes that have for ever lost their light ;
 My vesture mouldering with deep death’s disgrace,
 My heart as chill and bloodless as my face,
 My forehead like a stone ;
 My spirit sightless as my eyes are sightless,
 My inmost being nerveless, soulless, lightless,
 My joyous singing voice a harsh sepulchral moan.

“ My hair dishevelled dank with dews of night,
 From that far region of dim death I come,
 With eyes and soul and spirit void of light,
 With lips more sad in speech than stark and
 dumb :

Lo, you have ravaged me with dolorous thought
 Until my brain was wholly overwrought,
 Barren of flowers and fruit ;

Until my heart was bloodless for all passion,
Until my trembling lips could no more fashion
Sweet words to fit sweet airs of trembling lyre and lute.

“ From the sad regions of dim death I come ;
We tell no tales there for our tale is told,
We sing no songs there for our lips are dumb,
Likewise our hearts and brains are graveyard
mould ;
No wreathes of laurel, myrtle, ivy or vine,
About our pale and pulseless brows entwine,
And that sad frustrate realm
Nor amaranths nor asphodels can nourish,
But aconite and black-red poppies flourish
On such Lethean dews as fair life overwhelm.

“ We tell no tales more, we whose tale is told ;
As your brain withered and your heart grew chill
My heart and brain were turned to churchyard
mould,
Wherefore my singing voice sank ever still ;
And I, all heart and brain and voice, am dead ;
It is my Phantom here beside your bed
That speaketh to you now ;
Though you exist still, a mere form inurning
The ashes of dead fires of thought and yearning,
Dead faith, dead love, dead hope, in hollow breast
and brow.”

When it had moaned these words of hopeless doom,
The Phantom of the Muse once young and fair,

Pallid and dim from its disastrous tomb,
 Of Her so sweet and young and *débonnaire*,
 So rich of heart and brain and singing voice,
 So quick to shed sweet tears and to rejoice
 And smile with ravishing grace ;
 My soul was stupefied by its own reaping,
 Then burst into a flood of passionate weeping,
 Tears bitter as black blood streaming adown my face.

“ O Muse, so young and sweet and glad and fair,
 O Muse of hope and faith and joy and love,
 O Muse so gracious and so *débonnaire*,
 Darling of earth beneath and heaven above ;
 If Thou art gone into oblivious death,
 Why should I still prolong my painful breath ?
 Why still exist, the urn
 Holding of once-great fires the long dead ashes,
 No sole spark left of all their glow and flashes,
 Fires never to rekindle more and shine and burn ?

“ O Muse of hope and faith and joy and love,
 Soul of my soul, if Thou in truth art dead,
 A mournful alien in our world above,
 A Phantom moaning by my midnight bed ;
 How can I be alive, a hollow form
 With ashes of dead fires once bright and warm ?
 What thing is worth my strife ?
 The Past a great regret, the Present sterile,
 The Future hopeless, with the further peril
 Of withering down and down to utter death-in-life.

“Soul of my soul, canst Thou indeed be dead?

What mean for me if I accept their lore,
Thy words, O Phantom moaning by my bed,
‘I cannot sing again for evermore’?

I nevermore can think or feel or dream
Or hope or love — the fatal loss supreme!

I am a soulless clod;
No germ of life within me that surpasses
The little germs of weeds and flowers and grasses
Wherewith our liberal Mother decks the graveyard sod.

“I am half-torpid yet I spurn this lore,

I am long silent yet cannot avow
My singing voice is lost for evermore;

For lo, this beating heart, this burning brow,
This spirit gasping in keen spasms of dread
And fierce revulsion that it is not dead,

This agony of the sting:

What soulless clod could have these tears and
sobblings,

These terrors that are hopes, these passionate
throbbings?

Dear Muse, revive! we yet may dream and love and
sing!”

February 1882.

MATER TENEBRARUM

I

I N the endless nights, from my bed, where sleepless
in anguish I lie,
I startle the stillness and gloom with a bitter and
strong cry :
O Love! O Belovèd long lost! come down from thy
Heaven above,
For my heart is wasting and dying in uttermost famine
for love !
Come down for a moment! oh, come! Come serious
and mild
And pale, as thou wert on this earth, thou adorable
Child !
Or come as thou art, with thy sanctitude, triumph and
bliss,
For a garment of glory about thee ; and give me one
kiss,
One tender and pitying look of thy tenderest eyes,
One word of solemn assurance and truth that the soul
with its love never dies !

II

In the endless nights, from my bed, where sleepless in
frenzy I lie,
I cleave through the crushing gloom with a bitter and
deadly cry :

Oh! where have they taken my Love from our Eden
of bliss on this earth,
Which now is a frozen waste of sepulchral and horrible
dearth?
Have they killed her indeed? is her soul as her body,
which long
Has mouldered away in the dust where the foul worms
throng?
O'er what abhorrent Lethes, to what remotest star,
Is she rapt away from my pursuit through cycles and
systems far?
She is dead, she is utterly dead; for her life would
hear and speed
To the wild imploring cry of my heart that cries in its
dreadful need.

III

In the endless nights, on my bed, where sleeplessly
brooding I lie,
I burden the heavy gloom with a bitter and weary sigh:
No hope in this worn-out world, no hope beyond the
tomb;
No living and loving God, but blind and stony Doom.
Anguish and grief and sin, terror, disease and despair:
Why throw not off this life, this garment of torture I
wear,
And go down to sleep in the grave in everlasting rest?
What keeps me yet in this life, what spark in my frozen
breast?

A fire of dread, a light of hope, kindled, O Love, by
thee ;
For thy pure and gentle and beautiful soul, it must
immortal be.

1859.

L'ANCIEN RÉGIME ;

OR,

THE GOOD OLD RULE

WHO has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king,
Our king all kings above ?
A young girl brought him love ;
And he dowered her with shame,
With a sort of infamous fame,
And then with lonely years
Of penance and bitter tears :
Love is scarcely the thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king ?
A statesman brought him planned
Justice for all the land ;
And he in recompense got
Fierce struggle with brigue and plot,
Then a fall from lofty place
Into exile and disgrace :
Justice is never the thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
For a gift to our lord the king ?

A writer brought him truth ;
 And first he imprisoned the youth ;
 And then he bestowed a free pyre,
 That the works might have plenty of fire,
 And also to cure the pain
 Of the headache called thought in the brain :
 Truth is a very bad thing
 To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
 For a gift to our lord the king ?
 The people brought their sure
 Loyalty fervid and pure ;
 And he gave them bountiful spoil
 Of taxes and hunger and toil,
 Ignorance, brutish plight,
 And wholesale slaughter in fight :
 Loyalty's quite the worst thing
 To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
 For a gift to our lord the king ?
 A courtier brought to his feet
 Servility graceful and sweet,
 With an ever ready smile
 And an ever supple guile ;
 And he got in reward the place
 Of the statesman in disgrace :
 Servility's always a thing
 To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
 For a gift to our lord the king ?
 A soldier brought him war,
La gloire, la victoire,
 Ravage and carnage and groans,
 For the pious *Te Deum* tones ;
 And he got in return for himself
 Rank and honours and pelf :
 War is a very fine thing
 To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
 For a gift to our lord the king ?
 A harlot brought him her flesh,
 Her lusts, and the manifold mesh
 Of her wiles intervolved with caprice ;
 And he gave her his realm to fleece,
 To corrupt, to ruin, and gave
 Himself for her toy and her slave :
 Harlotry's just the thing
 To bring as a gift for our king.

Who has a thing to bring
 For a gift to our lord the king ?
 Our king who fears to die ?
 A priest brought him a lie,
 The blackness of hell uprolled
 In heaven's shining gold ;
 And he got as guerdon for that
 A see and a cardinal's hat :

A lie is an excellent thing
To bring as a gift for our king.

Has any one yet a thing
For a gift to our lord the king?
The country gave him a tomb,
A magnificent sleeping-room :
And for this it obtained some rest,
Clear riddance of many a pest,
And a hope which it much enjoyed
That the throne would continue void :
A tomb is the very best thing
For a gift to our lord the king.

1867.

THE SLEEPER 1

THE fire is in a steadfast glow,
The curtains drawn against the night ;
Upon the red couch soft and low
Between the fire and lamp alight
She rests half-sitting, half-reclining,
Encompassed by the cosy shining,
Her ruby dress with lace trimmed white.

Her left hand shades her drooping eyes
Against the fervour of the fire,
The right upon her cincture lies
In languid grace beyond desire,
A lily fallen among roses ;
So placidly her form reposes,
It scarcely seemeth to respire.

She is not surely all awake,
As yet she is not all asleep ;
The eyes with lids half-open take
A startled deprecating peep
Of quivering drowsiness, then slowly
The lids sink back, before she wholly
Resigns herself to slumber deep.

The side-neck gleams so pure beneath
The underfringe of gossamer,

1 Reprinted by permission from the *Cornhill Magazine*.

The tendrils of whose faery wreath
 The softest sigh suppressed would stir.
 The little pink-shell ear-rim flushes
 With her young blood's translucent blushes,
 Nestling in tresses warm as fur.

The contour of her cheek and chin
 Is curved in one delicious line,
 Pure as a vase of porcelain thin
 Through which a tender light may shine ;
 Her brow and blue-veined temple gleaming
 Beneath the dusk of hair back-streaming
 Are as a virgin's marble shrine.

The ear is burning crimson fire,
 The flush is brightening on the face,
 The lips are parting to suspire,
 The hair grows restless in its place
 As if itself new tangles wreathing ;
 The bosom with her deeper breathing
 Swells and subsides with ravishing grace.

The hand slides softly to caress,
 Unconscious, that fine-pencilled curve
 "Her lip's contour and downiness,"
 Unbending with a sweet reserve ;
 A tender darkness that abashes
 Steals out beneath the long dark lashes,
 Whose sightless eyes make eyesight swerve.

THE SLEEPER

The hand on chin and throat downslips,
Then softly, softly on her breast ;
A dream comes fluttering o'er the lips,
And stirs the eyelids in their rest,
And makes their undershadows quiver,
And like a ripple on a river
Glides through her breathing manifest.

I feel an awe to read this dream
So clearly written in her smile ;
A pleasant not a passionate theme,
A little love, a little guile ;
I fear lest she should speak revealing
The secret of some maiden feeling
I have no right to hear the while.

The dream has passed without a word
Of all that hovered finely traced ;
The hand has slipt down, gently stirred
To join the other at her waist ;
Her breath from that light agitation
Has settled to its slow pulsation ;
She is by deep sleep re-embraced.

Deep sleep, so holy in its calm,
So helpless, yet so awful too ;
Whose silence sheds as sweet a balm
As ever sweetest voice could do ;
Whose tranced eyes, unseen, unseeing
Shadowed by pure love, thrill our being
With tender yearnings through and through.

Sweet sleep ; no hope, no fear, no strife ;
The solemn sanctity of death,
With all the loveliest bloom of life ;
Eternal peace in mortal breath :
Pure sleep from which she will awaken
Refreshed as one who hath partaken
New strength, new hope, new love, new faith

January 1882.

ON A BROKEN PIPE

NEGLECTED now it lies a cold clay form,
So late with living inspirations warm :
Type of all other creatures formed of clay —
What more than it for Epitaph have they ?

DAY

WAKING one morning
In a pleasant land,
By a river flowing
Over golden sand :—

Whence flow ye, waters,
O'er your golden sand ?
We come flowing
From the Silent Land.

Whither flow ye, waters,
O'er your golden sand ?
We go flowing
To the Silent Land.

And what is this fair realm ?
A grain of golden sand
In the great darkness
Of the Silent Land.

1866.

NIGHT

HE cried out through the night :
“ Where is the light ?
Shall nevermore
Open Heaven’s door ?
Oh, I am left
Lonely, bereft ! ”

He cried out through the night :
It spread vaguely white,
With its ghost of a moon
Above the dark swoon
Of the earth lying chill,
Breathless, grave still.

He cried out through the night :
His voice in its might
Rang forth far and far,
And then like a star
Dwindled from sense
In the Immense.

He cried out through the night :
No answering light,
No syllabled sound ;
Beneath and around
A long shuddering thrill,
Then all again still.

1864.

WILLIAM BLAKE

HE came to the desert of London town
Grey miles long ;
He wandered up and he wandered down,
Singing a quiet song.

He came to the desert of London town,
Mirk miles broad ;
He wandered up and he wandered down,
Ever alone with God.

There were thousands and thousands of human kind
In this desert of brick and stone :
But some were deaf and some were blind,
And he was there alone.

At length the good hour came ; he died
As he had lived, alone :
He was not missed from the desert wide,
Perhaps he was found at the Throne.

1866.

THE white-rose garland at her feet,
The crown of laurel at her head,
Her noble life on earth complete,
Lay her in the last low bed
For the slumber calm and deep :
“ He giveth His belovèd sleep.”

Soldiers find their fittest grave
In the field whereon they died :
So her spirit pure and brave
Leaves the clay it glorified
To the land for which she fought
With such grand impassioned thought.

Keats and Shelley sleep at Rome,
She in well-loved Tuscan earth :
Finding all their death's long home
Far from their old home of birth,
Italy you hold in trust
Very sacred English dust.

Therefore this one prayer I breathe, —
That you yet may worthy prove
Of the heirlooms they bequeath
Who have loved you with such love :
Fairest land while land of slaves
Yields their free souls no fit graves.

1861.

THE FIRE THAT FILLED MY
HEART OF OLD

I

THE fire that filled my heart of old
Gave lustre while it burned ;
Now only ashes grey and cold
Are in its silence urned.
Ah! better was the furious flame,
The splendour with the smart :
I never cared for the singer's fame,
But, oh! for the singer's heart
Once more —
The burning fulgent heart !

II

No love, no hate, no hope, no fear,
No anguish and no mirth ;
Thus life extends from year to year,
A flat of sullen dearth.
Ah! life's blood creepeth cold and tame,
Life's thought plays no new part :
I never cared for the singer's fame,
But, oh! for the singer's heart
Once more —
The bleeding passionate heart !

1864.

SONG

“THE Nightingale was not yet heard,
For the Rose was not yet blown.”¹
His heart was quiet as a bird
Asleep in the night alone,
And never were its pulses stirred
To breathe or joy or moan :
The Nightingale was not yet heard
For the Rose was not yet blown.

Then She bloomed forth before his sight
In passion and in power,
And filled the very day with light,
So glorious was her dower ;
And made the whole vast moonlit night
As fragrant as a bower :
The young, the beautiful, the bright,
The splendid peerless Flower.

Whereon his heart was like a bird
When Summer mounts his throne,
And all its pulses thrilled and stirred
To songs of joy and moan,
To every most impassioned word
And most impassioned tone ;
The Nightingale at length was heard
For the Rose at length was blown.

February 1877.

¹ “ Traveller in Persia ” (Mr. Binning) ; cited by Mr. FitzGerald in the notes to his translation of Omar Khayyám.

A REQUIEM

THOU hast lived in pain and woe,
Thou hast lived in grief and fear;
Now thine heart can dread no blow,
Now thine eyes can shed no tear:
Storms round us shall beat and rave;
Thou art sheltered in the grave.

Thou for long, long years hast borne,
Bleeding through Life's wilderness,
Heavy loss and wounding scorn;
Now thine heart is burdenless:
Vainly rest for ours we crave;
Thine is quiet in the grave.

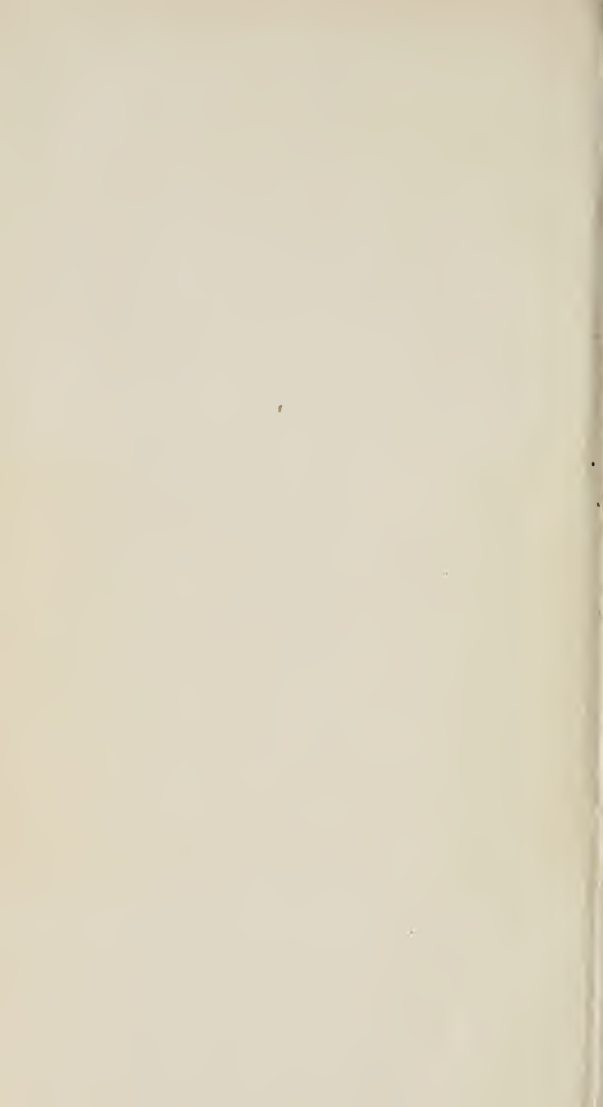
We must toil with pain and care,
We must front tremendous Fate,
We must fight with dark Despair:
Thou dost dwell in solemn state,
Couched triumphant, calm and brave,
In the ever-holy grave.

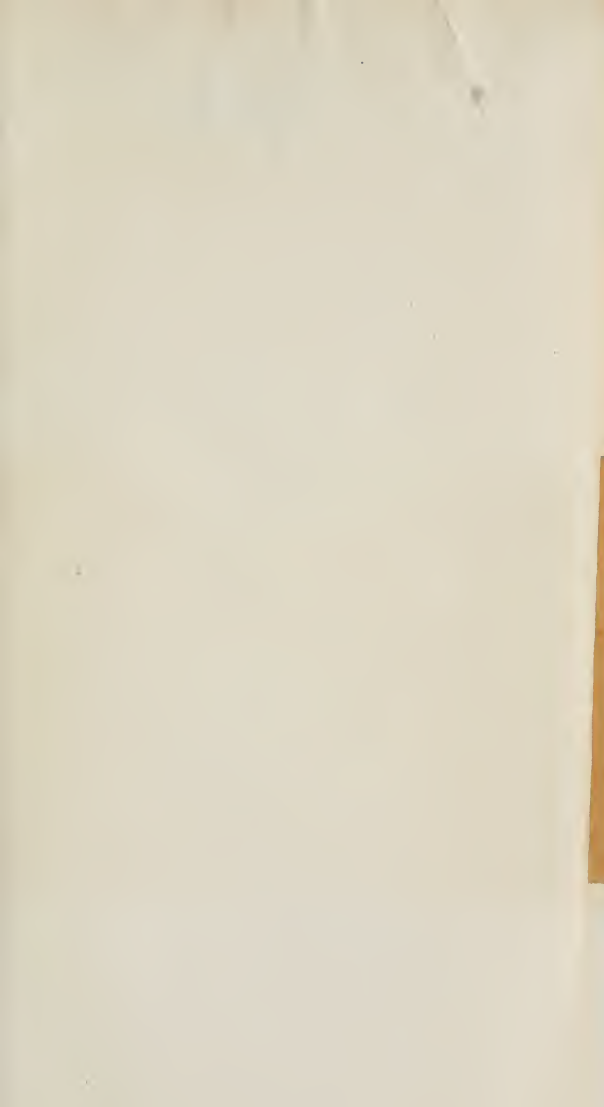
1858.



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